HOLY CITY OF MARS by RALPH M. FARLEY AL P. NELSON

Fantastic ADVENTURES

5c

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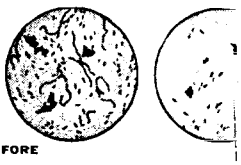

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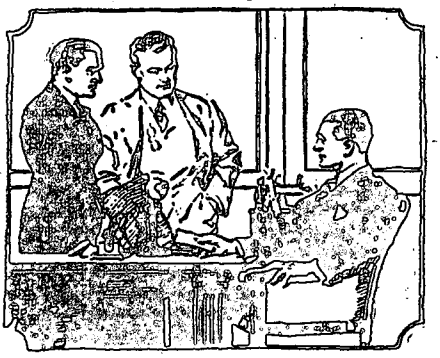

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VOL. 4
NO. 5

Fantastic ADVENTURES 1942

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Front cover painting by Malcolm Smith illustrating a scene in "Daughter of the Snake God." Illustrations by Ned Hadley; Magarian; Joe Sewell; Robert Fuqua; Jay Jackson; Pemble; L. Raymond Jones; Rod Ruth

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FANTASTIC ADVENTURES MAY, 1942

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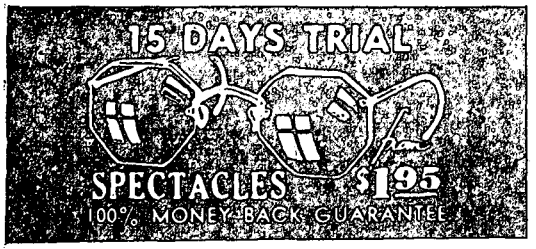

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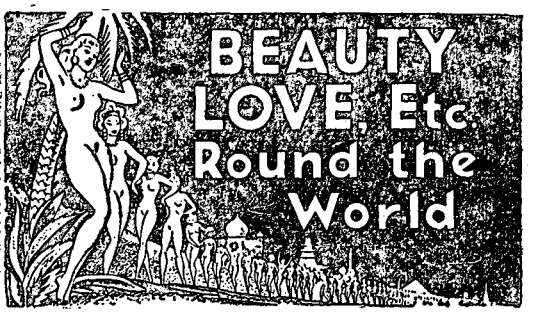

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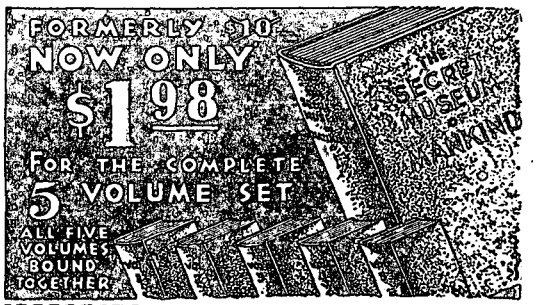

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ONCE more Malcolm Smith does the front cover of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. There was no doubt that you liked the cover he did last month, and he'll be delighted to see all the fan mail you sent us about it.

But this month, we think, he's outdone himself. Here, we think, is a true fantasy cover. This type of thing hasn't been done since Paul did the covers for A. Merritt's splendid story "The Moon Pool." We hereby nominate Mr. Smith as the boy who "goes to town" on such things as monster snakes. Even if it is a horribly menacing thing, it's a beautiful snake. And the Smith girl, to point out an obvious fact, is not so bad herself!

WE decided to use this cover at the last minute, and unfortunately no author had as yet seen it, and gone to work on a cover story to go along with it.

So we called in John York Cabot and William P. McGivern, directed that they barricade themselves in a room, and write a novel to fill the bill. They did it in ten days, but only by a miracle. Mr. Cabot became ill, and Mr. McGivern suffered an accident to his wrist that prevented typing.

If Mr. Tink (of "Tink Takes a Hand") hadn't helped them out, we suspect, Smith's fine cover would have gone to bed illustrating some forty blank pages!

IN this issue you'll find the story you've been asking for since its initial counterpart was published. The long awaited sequel to "City of Lost Souls" by Ralph Milne Farley and Al. P. Nelson begins on page 78. We think you'll like it as well as its predecessor.

REMEMBER John Broome? He wrote "The Land of Wooden Men" quite some time ago. Well, he's back with an odd little story that'll tickle you no end. It's about Mr. Pym, who is in rather an unfortunate situation. You see, he's only got two dimensions. Therefore he must live in mirrors, and things like that. It's tough to be reflected around at the speed of light, but then, Mr. Pym deserves it—because he's strictly a rat. He's not to be trusted.

YOUR enthusiasm for Mr. Robert Bloch's latest effort makes the cockles of our heart, whatever they are, warm. So we present another story told by that inexhaustible liar, Lefty Feep. At least we *think* he's lying. However, that matter of the bowling wasn't quite finished, and Bloch did another yarn to wind up the dwarf and his amazing skill.

A NEWCOMER to our ranks is a rather famous Wisconsin author. August W. Derleth (who wrote that swell novel "Place of Hawks") has given us a very short story which has a very pleasing "different" atmosphere. Incidentally, Derleth and Bloch are great friends, and it's quite a coincidence for them both to appear in the same issue.

USUALLY we don't say much about the articles in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. We're a bit inclined to think of them as handy things to fill little holes with—but this time we've got to admit that we've got something here! Take for instance "Sudden Death From Sound." There's an article that is as fantastic as they come, and it'll make you think pretty seriously.

IF the Japs were to get such a weapon in working order, we'd be out of luck. Not that it doesn't seem now that the Japs hardly *need* such a weapon to kick the stuffing out of us! What with Java the last outpost (at this writing) and the little yellow-bellies knocking at India's back door, and vexingly near to our own.

IN that connection we might go Nostradamus one better and make a few predictions of our own. Java will fall. So will Burma. Hitler will strike toward the Suez simultaneously with Japan's assault upon India's rear. Australia will find itself battling for its life within two months from the day Java falls. General McArthur will not be driven from the Philippines for quite some time, because the Japs will go around him until other objectives are reached.

THE Burma road will be closed to China, and China will launch an attack into Thailand which will cause the Japs much trouble. Hitler's spring offensive into Russia will gain great speed, and if Japan can clean up the South Pacific by that time, she will attack Russia from the rear through Manchuria and Korea.

NORWAY will fall to combined British and American assault. But Hitler's Atlantic fleet, now greatly strengthened by the escape of his

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three most important vessels from the "trap" at Brest, will finally force a great sea battle which may cripple American sea forces for several months. The end of 1942 will find the Axis at the peak of its success, but facing a growing flood of resistance which will evidence itself in the spring of 1943.

THE homeland of America will find itself attacked, to the anger and surprise of many still sleeping Americans. But America will win the war by reason of mechanical might. Sadly, the years will be long. Only a miracle can avert at least five years of war.

THE United States fleet will spread havoc in a series of daring raids throughout the Pacific Islands. Jap forces at two (unnamed for obvious reasons) islands will be wiped out.

AUSTRALIA and America will join hands in the defense of the continent "down under." Only then will it become apparent that the only way to win the war is to attack. There can be no defense against mechanized "spearhead" warfare.

TOKYO will be bombed repeatedly by American bombers, and later in the year, Russian air squadrons will augment the raids. American airmen will sink a disastrous portion of the Jap navy.

WHICH ends our predictions concerning the war, but we have another prediction to make concerning FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. It's the coming next month of one of the finest time-travel stories we've read in quite a long time. It's William P. McGivern's "Safari to the Lost Ages."

And it marks the third cover in succession for Malcolm Smith. Which seems to be something of a feat in the past few years. In fact, we don't recall any artist achieving that record since FANTASTIC ADVENTURE'S inception. Robert Fuqua has had two in a row several times.

ORIGINALLY, we only had stories written around finished covers. But recently we have given artists such as Magarian and Finlay such assignments, and they have turned in illustrations which are of superior quality. Possibly this is because their imaginations were unhampered by the necessity of illustrating a scene exactly as the author had described it. It seems much easier for an author to write an already completed illustration into a story than for an artist to illustrate that story.

However, the recent success of writing stories after illustrations are completed (mind you this happens to only one in about twenty of our stories) have proved that an illustration, which is unexplained, serves to stimulate the imagination of the author, and the illustration then becomes the central part of the story.

THE queer part of it is that were we to give two different authors a look at the same illustration, the stories they would turn in would be very much different. The human imagination is a wonderful thing.

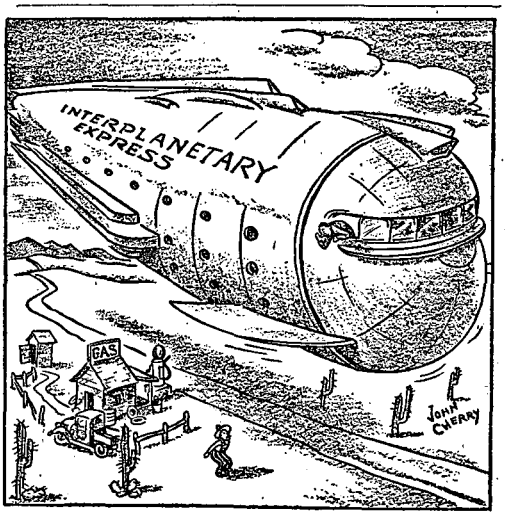
THE June issue of our companion magazine will contain a story that we feel we ought to mention to the readers of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Perhaps one of the best liked authors of ten years ago was a mysterious person named Anthony Gilmore. Many readers supposed, for some reason, that Anthony Gilmore was not Anthony Gilmore, but perhaps some famous personage like H. G. Wells, or Ambrose Bierce writing under a pen name. The fact is that Anthony Gilmore was a very fine writer in his own right, and his skill was not a cloaked or borrowed one.

HIS greatest character, Hawk Carse, a swashbuckling spaceman who went through some of the grandest adventures ever written in fantastic fiction, is the reason for this blurb. And it's not simply a blurb—we are passing this on because we don't want you to miss anything really good.

Hawk Carse, authored by Anthony Gilmore, who for our money *is* Anthony Gilmore himself, will appear in a complete novel in the June issue of *Amazing Stories*. Don't say we didn't tell you!

J. ALLEN ST. JOHN has turned in his finest cover—and he got the idea from the ancient legend of Jupiter and Leda. You know, perhaps, of how Jupiter fell in love with an Earth woman, and gave her wings so that she might fly up to him and love him? Well, Don Wilcox, who is recovering from an emergency appendectomy, is doing a story for it which will become a new legend, in the dim future, if we know our legends!

(Continued on page 128)



"Fill 'er up!"

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Allan Curtis and Jo Matthews stared at the incredible battle going on . . .

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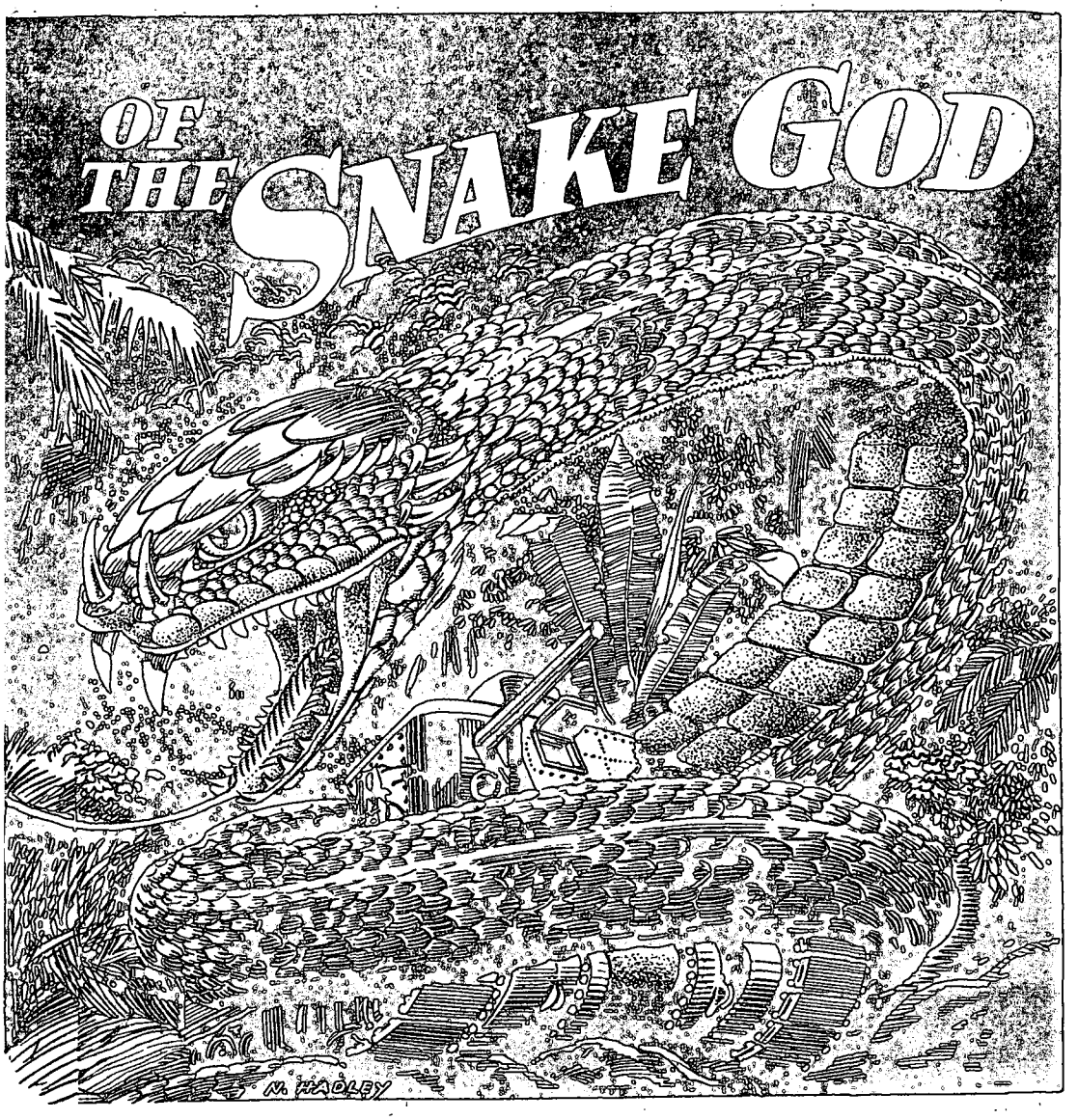

by JOHN YORK CABOT
and
WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Allan Curtis and Jo Matthews faced deadly danger even before they reached Peru; a murder, Nazi tanks—and Sacha!

"ALLAN! Do you hear me? Allan!"

The voice finally penetrated the fog of concentration that surrounded Allan Curtis and he looked up to see his secretary standing in the doorway of the stockroom.

"Ah, oh, yes, Miss Matthews," he said abstractedly. He checked the last of a long list of supply cases on the typewritten sheet in his hand.

Jo Matthews, the young lady in question, moved back quickly to avert

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a collision as he stepped toward her.

"Allan," she repeated sharply, "I've sent the check list to the docks."

Allan Curtis halted, then.

"Good, Miss Matthews," he said abstractedly. When lost in his fogs he always addressed her formally. "That's fine. I've just finished making a final check on our crates. The list seems in order."

He handed her the typewritten sheets he'd been holding. Sighing, Jo Matthews took them. Her lovely features wore the affectionately despairing look of a mother worrying over an idiot offspring.

"Have you made certain your luggage is in order, Allan?" Jo asked.

Allan Curtis nodded, standing toward his private office.

"Yes. Yes, I've done that. How about your stuff? Got it ready?"

Jo's blue eyes were amused. She'd told him her luggage was packed on at least four occasions this morning. She followed after him, into his office.

"Yes, Allan. My bags are ready. I've had them sent to the dock hours ago."

"Hmmmm," Curtis muttered, scarcely hearing, "that's fine. Just fine. Rather early to send them, wasn't it?" He sat down behind his rich mahogany desk and began shuffling through papers.

"I've told you that there's a war going on," Jo said. "It takes plenty of time to get things through inspection these days."

"Hmmmm," Curtis agreed. "That's right. The war makes it difficult, doesn't it?"

Jo's eyes went suddenly impatient with annoyance.

"Difficult? Really, Allan," her tone was one of exasperated bewilderment, "doesn't anything bother you? I really don't believe the fact that our nation is facing one of the most gigantic struggles in its history, has yet penetrated your mind. You probably haven't a thought in your head but those stuffy Peruvian ruins and rotting fossil bones."

"Just ruins," Curtis corrected her. "We aren't out after bones this trip." He looked up, his eyes suddenly twinkling. "Really, Jo, I don't think you're the least bit pleased about this first chance to come along on an expedition."

"Well," said the girl in mock elation, "he called me 'Jo!' He must have emerged from the Peruvian jungles long enough to remember I had a first name."

Curtis grinned.

"It was a long time before I called you anything but Miss Matthews, Jo. I got into a habit that I still fall back on now and then, when I'm thinking of something else."

Jo Matthews sighed. Then her voice became imperceptibly softer.

"I'm really excited over this trip, Allan. And I'm terribly grateful to be going along. I know that you went to a lot of unnecessary trouble with the museum people to persuade them to let me come as your assistant. But even so, Allan, I can't help thinking sometimes that now, I mean since December, the importance of things like this have dimmed a great deal."

ALLAN CURTIS lighted a cigarette. He blew out the match and flicked it unerringly into a priceless Inca jug that stood in the corner.

He inhaled deeply, then spoke smilingly through a swirl of blue smoke.

"The importance of anything is only relative, Jo," Curtis said. "What might seem to be important to the world of today is, after all, only measured by the countless centuries in time that went before it, and will undoubtedly follow

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it. Just because this world goes mad, I see no reason to let my intelligence be swept away in the emotional turmoil of others."

Jo Matthew's lovely mouth was set.

"No," she snapped, "I don't believe you are capable of reacting emotionally."

Curtis was still smiling, tolerantly.

"Do you think the wheels of science, research, progress and discovery should stop while the world goes mad?"

"There will be an end to progress and civilization, science and research—of the decent democratic way—if we lose this war, Allan. I think certain things can be set aside until the objective is accomplished, otherwise we'll ultimately lose those things."

Allan Curtis shrugged.

"I've spent most of my rather young life prowling about the ruins of ancient civilizations, Jo. Those were civilizations as great, in their time, as our own is now. They died. But the world didn't die. Progress didn't die."

Jo's eyes were moist.

"But don't you see what I mean, Allan? You could turn your knowledge, your mind, to the accomplishment of far more important tasks for the duration. I know that your career has been and will always be your very life. But the careers, the lives, the futures of all of us are menaced beyond realization."

"Then you think this expedition of ours will be of no real consequence?" Curtis asked.

"I didn't say exactly that," Jo declared in exasperation. "It has its place, I'll admit, and it is important in the normal scheme of things. But now the normal scheme of life has been abandoned. There are relatively more important missions for all of us."

"Ahhh," Curtis grinned irritatingly, "now we get to the crux of the matter. You think I should be putting my shoulder to another wheel, right?"

Jo's eyes flashed defensively.

"Yes, Allan. You have one of the finest young minds in this nation. You're capable, strong, with a tremendous amount of valuable knowledge of almost every god-forsaken jungle in the world. I'm certain there are things other than puttering in decayed ruins which you could do to serve. Things that would utilize your knowledge, your youth, your ability for our country's effort."

"You make me blush, Jo. I never thought secretaries thought so highly of their employers."

Jo turned angrily toward the door.

"Sometimes I think quite the opposite, Allen. If I didn't think you talk as you do merely because you're blinded to actuality, I wouldn't be your secretary."

CURTIS looked at the tip of his cigarette. His eyes were still amused.

"Then your unswerving loyalty still persists because you hope to make me see the light, eh?"

Jo paused. The anger left her lovely face. Her eyes were serious.

"Your attitude might be blind for the present, Allan, but I'm sure your mind will rouse you to your responsibilities fairly soon. And when it does, well," Jo colored, "you'll have a secretary who is as proud of her boss as she is loyal."

Curtis seemed suddenly embarrassed. He returned his scrutiny to the lighted end of his cigarette. Then suddenly, clearing his throat, he changed the subject.

"Our tickets are all arranged for, Jo?"

"Passports, visas, tickets, all in order," she smiled. "And please, please, don't get lost in one of your fogs and miss the boat. It leaves at four o'clock.

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I'll meet you on the ship's end of the gangplank."

Curtis grinned.

"No," he promised, "I won't be late. I've never missed a sailing time yet."

"What about the Tahitian trip?" Jo reminded him accusingly.

Curtis reddened.

"Well, I might amend that by saying I almost never miss a sailing time. Four o'clock. Top of the gangplank. I'll see you then, Jo. You'd better run along now. I know the female of the species is always beset by a thousand last-minute details before going anywhere."

Jo raised one eyebrow.

"Really, Allan, sometimes I think you aren't completely hopeless."

Curtis looked up.

"Eh, what d'you mean?"

"Sometimes you actually seem aware that there is such a thing as a female of the species. Your remark about details almost indicates that you observe the species occasionally." Jo's voice was mockingly analytical, but her eyes held another emotion not quite completely masked.

Curtis, however, had turned his attention back to the papers on the desk before him. He answered without looking up.

"Is that so? Guess I must have read it somewhere in a book."

Jo gave him a long glance and sighed in despair.

"See you at the ship," she said.

"Right."

CURTIS didn't look up as Jo Matthews left the office. He heard the door shut behind her and continued his scrutiny of the papers before him for another full minute before he raised his head.

He crushed out his cigarette, rose, and stepped to the door of his own office. He closed it, flicking the lock switch. Then he went back to his desk and, still standing, leaned over it to an ancient shield which hung on the wall.

Carefully, Curtis took down the shield. There was a wall safe on the surface it had been covering. Expertly he flicked the dial until the combination clicked the tumblers. Then he swung it open. He brought forth a thick manila envelope, then sat down at his desk as he opened it.

There were at least a dozen papers inside, but Curtis sheafed through the stack until he'd found the three he sought. On the top of each there was the letterhead reading: "Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs."

He hastily read through each of these letters, as if making one last check on instruction data he had already committed to memory. Then, apparently satisfied, he placed them in his large ashtray. He found a match.

Moments later, Curtis watched the letters burn to blackened ashes in the tray. Then, after carefully powdering the ashes with his thumb, he emptied the tray into the wastebasket at his feet. He put the remaining papers back in the envelope, stood up and returned them to the wall safe, closed the safe and twisted the dial right and left.

After Curtis had replaced the ancient shield in its position on the wall, he stepped over to the door, unlocked it, and moved out into the reception office.

His luggage was there, five traveling bags. His trunks, he recalled, were already aboard the ship.

Curtis stepped to the window of his office, a window looking from Telegraph Hill toward San Francisco Bay.

Lighting another cigarette, Curtis stood there a moment, gazing idly down into the street beneath him.

Against the building on the other side

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of the street, standing half in the concealment of the doorway, were two men. One wore a camel's hair topcoat, the other merely a blue serge suit. Both had gray fedoras.

The one with the camel's hair topcoat was apparently reading a newspaper, while the chap in the serge suit passed idle conversation with him.

Curtis stood at the window watching this, waiting to see if either would look up at him. Then, smiling grimly, he drew the venetian blinds.

Crossing the reception room, he went to his luggage, selected a bag, placed it on a desk and opened it. Inside, atop some shirts and papers, was an automatic pistol. Next to it lay a leather shoulder holster. Curtis removed the gun and the holster and restrapped the bag.

He slipped out of his coat, arranged the holster, and placed the gun in it. Then he put his coat on once again, buttoned it, and looked down, satisfied that the weapon was well enough concealed.

He glanced at his wrist watch. Three-fifteen. He stepped to the telephone to call for a taxi . . .

CHAPTER II

Rendezvous with a Killer

THE small, dingy waterfront cafe was typical of the dozens that lined the narrow streets of San Francisco's harbor district. A few small tables covered with dirty red-checkered cloths were set up in the middle of the floor. Dark, and curtained booths lined three of the walls.

At a small bar a sleepy looking bartender presided. Two unsavory waiters leaned negligently against the wall.

The only distinctive feature of this particular cafe was the couple that occupied the booth closest to the door. They sat quietly, not talking, and only occasionally sipping from the small glasses of brandy before them.

The man was tall, with heavy sloping shoulders that bulged slightly against his smoothly-fitting, conservative suit. His hair was blond and combed straight back from his high shining forehead. In contrast to his square, almost cruel jaw, his eyes were a soft blue, surprisingly out of place in his hard face.

The woman could have been twenty-five or she could have been forty-five. She was immaculately groomed and dressed, and her complexion was as flawless and as smooth as a child's.

But her eyes were strangely lacking in warmth. They were like two perfect diamonds, hard, cold and ageless. Hair the color of new wheat fell in rippling waves to her shoulders, but she was not beautiful, although she should have been. If there had been more expression in her face, or warmth in her eyes, she would have possessed an ethereal allure. As it was, her very frigidity and aloofness seemed to encase her in a shell of icy mystery that had the effect of repelling rather than attracting.

She raised her glass slowly and over the rim her eyes met those of her companion.

"Our friend is late," she murmured.

The man glanced at his watch and a faint expression of annoyance touched his features.

"There is plenty of time," he muttered. "The ship does not leave until four. Are you sure, my dear Maria, of your role?"

THE woman sipped her drink slowly.

"Perfectly sure. As your devoted sister, Maria von Wessel, I have a simple part to play. Yours is by far the more difficult, my dear Kurt."

A faint mocking undertone colored the woman's soft voice, as she added,

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"Your role demands that you display a certain amount of brotherly affection toward your dear 'sister.' That will be a difficult part for you to play."

The man shrugged irritably.

"You must keep your emotions out of your work, Maria. If there was ever anything between us, we must forget it."

"You have, of course, my dear Kurt."

Kurt von Wessel's deceptively soft eyes frosted slightly.

"Maria, my dear, your beauty has made you extremely useful to the Cause. When your attractiveness is past, your usefulness is over. Remember that one fact and control your feelings."

He toyed idly with his glass and his smile was delicately cruel.

"It would be a pity," he said, "if I were forced to report that your allure was dimming. Even now, in this highly unflattering light, I can see a faint wrinkle at the corner of your mouth."

The woman's hand moved instinctively toward her cheek. Kurt smiled as he saw the gesture. Maria checked herself and folded her hands calmly in her lap.

"You are a beast," she said softly.

Kurt von Wessel lifted his glass and smiled.

"But, of course," he said.

THEY were silent for a while, both occupied with thinking. It was the sudden opening of the cafe's door that brought them to life.

"Is it he?" Kurt asked quietly.

Maria raised herself slightly from the seat. When she settled back her face was suddenly pale. Her slim white fingers trembled as she pulled the brim of her hat over her eye, concealing the side of her face.

"What is it?" Kurt asked sharply.

A tall, slim, olive-skinned young man strode past their booth before she could answer. He didn't look at them but continued on to the bar, where he ordered a double whiskey in a loud voice.

He was elegantly dressed and quite handsome in the dark Latin manner. His flashing white teeth stood out sharply against his dark skin, and his luminous brown eyes were good-naturedly rakish.

"Who is he?" Kurt demanded. "What are you afraid of?"

"Quiet," Maria hissed. "Do you want him to hear every word you say? He is a young fool I met in Peru a year or so ago. His name is Carlos Benevadas. I think his father is a diplomatic official. It wouldn't do for him to see me now. He knew me as Sonya Karlstad, a Norwegian refugee."

"Was your business with him official?" Kurt asked, a tight smile playing about his lips.

"Yes. Of course there were several unofficial interludes. The fool thought he was madly in love with me."

"I see," Kurt nodded. "I see you were able to forget me long enough to indulge in — ah — unofficial interludes with this hot-blooded young Latin. Very touching example of your constant devotion to me."

Maria's cheeks flamed angrily.

"I have thrown myself at many men," she said hoarsely. "It has never bothered you. And it has meant nothing to me."

"Let us not become hysterical," Kurt suggested quietly, "I will draw the shades of the booth. Your young admirer will soon be gone."

He stood up and jerked the dark curtains over the entrance of the booth. Maria turned her hat back from her eyes.

FOR several moments they waited in silence, their drinks untouched.

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Then they heard quick footsteps crossing the floor, a careless laugh and an instant later the sound of the cafe door slamming.

"Ah," said Kurt, "the coast is again clear."

He glanced at his watch and frowned. He fingered his glass impatiently.

"Has the fool forgotten," he growled.

"Maybe he didn't receive the instructions," Maria suggested. "In America now it is becoming increasingly difficult to continue our contacts. The federal agents of this country are very efficient."

"They are a lot of fools," Kurt snapped. "In Germany we shoot traitors and spies. Here, until only a few months ago, they allowed them the use of the press and radio to spread their doctrines. Well, their complacent carelessness has been our strongest ally."

He drummed his fingers nervously on the table. Finally they heard the sound of the cafe door opening. Kurt stood up and cautiously drew back the curtain of the booth.

An almost imperceptible sigh of relief escaped him.

Standing inside the doorway was a chunky, red-faced man, with closely cropped light hair, and a thin scar running along his jaw line.

When the man's small, cold-blue eyes met Kurt's they glinted with recognition. With a rolling stride he advanced to the booth and bowed from the waist.

"I have the tickets for the gentleman and his sister," he said softly. He glanced over his shoulder at the sleepy bartender and the indifferent waiters. "Everything is arranged."

"Sit down," Kurt said.

The chunky red-faced man drew a chair to the table and seated himself.

"You know the man?" Kurt asked.

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"I am positive. I have studied his pictures. I have a complete physical description of him. There can be no chance of a mistake."

"Excellent. He must not leave the *Ventura* alive."

"Everything has been arranged," the red-faced man said stolidly.

"How long have you been a steward on the *Ventura?*" Kurt asked the man suddenly.

"Three years," the man answered. "But this is my last trip. It is no longer safe."

"This is the most important trip you will ever make," Kurt said slowly. "Remember that. And remember too, not to indicate by so much as a raised eyebrow that you have ever seen me or my 'sister' before, when we come on the boat. This man is no fool. We can take no chances. Do not speak to us. Do not look at us. Do nothing to invite suspicion."

"I understand my job," the red-faced man said impassively.

"Good. Now, leave us. Good luck to you."

"Thank you sir."

The man stood up and the pale light of the cafe threw a silvery edge on the long scar on his chin. His blue eyes were coldly expressionless as he bowed formally and left.

Maria shuddered slightly as the door closed.

"Cold, my dear?" Kurt asked.

Maria finished her drink quickly and set the glass down.

"No. It was that man. He—he is a killer."

Kurt von Wessel looked at her for an instant with a thoughtful expression on his face. Finally he smiled ironically and his soft blue eyes were amused.

"Precisely, my dear," he said.

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CHAPTER III

An "Accident"

ON the passenger deck of the South American Steamship *Ventura,* Jo Matthews leaned against the railing and gazed out at the scene of crowded activity on the dock below.

Passengers, stevedores, inspectors, ship stewards hustled back and forth in the shouting commotion, brushing past lines of well-wishers gathered to bid *bon voyage* to departing friends and relatives.

Thronging up the gangplank, singly and in groups of four and five, other passengers, late arrivals and their retinues of well wishing friends, came noisily aboard.

There were uniformed men, in naval and army attire—some whose high rank was indicated by the gold and silver braid that bedecked them—also dotting the embarking swarms in more profusion than Jo had seen since war began.

Nervously, now, Jo glanced at her watch.

"Twenty of four," she murmured anxiously. "Oh, I do hope the lanky lout will remember he's a boat to catch."

"You are waiting for someone, Señorita?"

The voice, low, polite and definitely Latin came to Jo's ears suddenly, causing her to turn sharply in surprise.

A tall, olive-complexioned, smiling young man with wavy dark hair faced her.

Jo raised an eyebrow.

"Well, really," she began.

The tall young Latin grinned in a manner meant to be apologetically friendly. There was something assuringly nice about the twinkle in his brown eyes.

"I do not intend to intrude, Señorita. Especially if I am unwelcome. Excuse me, if you feel I have affronted you." He was still grinning.

In spite of herself, Jo smiled.

"My name, Señorita," the Latin declared, "is Carlos Benevedas."

"And mine," said Jo, "is Jo Matthews. I'm glad to meet you, Señor Benevedas, even though this is slightly out of my usual insistence on formal introductions."

Carlos Benevedas laughed.

"It is so, Señorita. I knew it instantly I spoke. But permit me to assure you that this is a usual fashion of introduction aboard shipboard. People are never so rigidly formal at sea, especially when bound for South American ports."

"I needn't be bright," Jo smiled, "to hazard, then, that you are South American?"

Benevedas' white teeth flashed in another smile.

"More exactly, I am Peruvian. We in South America are often touchy about being so generally classed."

"You are returning home?" Jo asked.

Carlos Benevedas nodded.

"After a short stay in your most delightful country."

"I'm glad you like it here," Jo said. And then she added: "I hope most of you feel the same about this country."

"I am sure your country will be publicly assured of that fact within the next several weeks," Benevadas replied.

"You mean the South American Solidarity movement, of course?" Jo asked.

The young Peruvian nodded.

"Precisely."

"That's reassuring," said Jo. "I'd like to pass that information on to our State Department."

BENEVEDAS laughed appreciatively.

"But tell me, Señorita," he said after

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a moment, "you are waiting for someone, are you not? I know I noticed you glancing at your watch with much anxiety. Perhaps a fellow passenger?"

"An excellent guess, Señor," Jo said. "I'm just praying that my boss, who has one of the most fuzzy memories of any man on earth, won't forget he has a sailing appointment."

"You are going to South America on business?" Benevedas asked.

"Yes," Jo nodded. "This is my first long trip, and I'm still dizzy from the thought of it. We're going to your native Peru. My employer, Allan Curtis, is an archæological curator and part-time explorer."

"Curtis, Curtis?" Carlos Benevedas put a slim finger to his cheek in recollection. "I do believe I have heard of Professor Curtis."

"Quite possibly," Jo said with unconscious pride. "He has done some of the most notable discovery work on Inca ruins. He's extremely well known in his field."

"But of course!" Carlos Benevedas exclaimed. "My father—he is in the Peruvian Department of State—once gave a banquet in Lima to honor several noted American archæologists who were working in our country. I believe your Professor Curtis was one of them."

They both grinned in the warm enthusiasm of those who have found mutual friends.

"Then Professor Curtis must be planning another such expedition?" Carlos Benevedas asked.

Jo nodded.

"And he moved heaven and high water, as a favor to his long-suffering secretary, to get permission from the museum people for me to go along."

"It will be an experience you shall never forget," the young Latin promised her. "My country is beautiful beyond imagination. And the interior—you will see much of that I presume—offers such splendor as few men have ever seen."

"It sounds thrilling," Jo declared. "Will it be dangerous?"

Benevedas shook his head.

"Not so dangerous that your life would be risked in such an expedition. And with the famed Professor Curtis, who knows our deepest jungles the way an ordinary man knows his own back yard, the expedition would be foolproof. No, it will not be dangerous."

"I'm slightly disappointed," she declared. "Allan isn't very imaginative, but I had a hunch when he told me something about the expedition, and others he'd been on before, that I might get a chance to see something exciting."

Benevedas laughed.

"Exciting things you will see," he promised. "But danger, I am sure, Professor Curtis will keep from you."

"THE trip should be exciting," Jo said. "The menace of submarines is supposed to be frightful."

Benevedas nodded soberly.

"Yes, the menace is all you say. But I will warrant that this ship will be more than well protected. Besides, the submarine devils are more concerned with ships carrying valuable cargo than they are passenger vessels. The small cargo this vessel carries would not be worth the price of a torpedo."

"Are the submarines so well informed as to cargo values and sailing schedules?" Jo asked.

Benevedas waved his hand expressively.

"Señorita, when you have seen as much espionage at work as I have in my own native land, nothing the enemy learns would surprise you. Yes, it is unfortunate that leakages of information very often occur. But I do not think we have too much to fear for the

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safe journey of this ship."

Jo suddenly looked down at her watch. It was ten minutes to four. She looked anxiously down at the dock.

"Do not fear, Señorita," said Benevedas, "a competent man never hurries. Your Señor Curtis should arrive at any moment."

And then Jo saw the familiar brown fedora of the lanky Allan Curtis bobbing through the crowds on the dockside. Beside him moved several porters with his luggage.

"There he is," Jo cried in relief.

Benevedas smiled.

"I told you not to be alarmed," he said. Then: "Would you mind if I waited with you to meet Professor Curtis?"

Jo looked at the tropical handsomeness of Carlos Benevedas, his extravagantly-tailored American attire. She grinned. If anything could bring a twinge to Allan Curtis, it would be the well-meaning attentions of a handsome Latin.

"Not at all," Jo said. "I'm sure Allan would love to meet you."

Then Curtis was coming up the gangplank, porters still carrying his grips behind him. He saw Jo, and his generous mouth and long face crinkled in a grin of salute. His eyes, behind the thick horn rims of his glasses, matched the friendly crinkle of his smile.

Jo moved over to the front of the gangplank. Carlos Benevedas was at her side.

"You kept me in terrible suspense," Jo smiled, as Curtis came up to them.

Curtis grinned.

"The best thing to do with a lady," he answered.

"Did you read that out of a book, too?" Jo demanded.

CURTIS saw Benevedas, then, and looked questioningly at him.

Jo turned slightly.

"Allan, this is Señor Carlos Benevedas, he's a Peruvian returning to his beloved country. Señor Benevedas, Mr. Allan Curtis."

"I am charmed," Benevedas flashed a white grin.

"Glad to meet you," Curtis declared, shaking hands warmly. "You aren't related by any chance to Alvardo Benevedas, the Peruvian statesman?"

"He is my father," Benevedas said proudly. "I was telling Señorita Matthews, just a moment ago, that I recall my father once having had you and another American explorer as his guests at a banquet in Lima."

"Right you are," Curtis grinned warmly. "A distinguished and brilliant man, your father."

"*Muy, muy gracias,* Señor," Benevedas smiled, flattered.

A uniformed steward suddenly appeared at Curtis' elbow. He was a short, chunky, red-faced man. His blond hair was closely cropped, it was apparent even though he wore his uniform cap, and there was a thin scar cleaving the jaw line on the left side of his face.

The steward's small, cold-blue eyes studied Curtis inquisitively an instant before he spoke.

"You are Mr. Allan Curtis?" he asked.

Curtis nodded.

"That's correct."

"If you will pardon the inconvenience, sir, I wish you would have your porters take your luggage over there," he indicated an open space of deck close to the yawning cargo hatches into which loading cranes were yet dropping crates, "for a last minute inspection."

Curtis frowned.

"Isn't that rather irregular? Can't you go through my stuff in my stateroom?"

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The steward smiled.

"I am sorry, sir, and I realize it is somewhat irregular. But there was an anonymous report turned in, undoubtedly a crank call, to the effect that contraband material has been smuggled aboard ship. We were told to check the luggage of any male passengers arriving within ten minutes of sailing time. You are the only one to arrive within that time so far. It is troublesome, but you must understand our necessity to check on any and all such reports in times such as these."

"Very well," Curtis said. He turned to his porters. "Follow the steward with the baggage. Put it where he tells you."

"I'd prefer you to be with me during the inspection," the steward smiled. "It will be the one courtesy I can extend."

Curtis nodded, following after the porters and the steward. At the place he'd indicated previously, the steward had the porters drop the luggage. They left, then, and Curtis watched the chunky fellow begin his inspection of the bags.

ABOVE them, huge loading cranes still swung large packing crates up from the dock, over the deck, and lowered them into the yawning cargo hold.

Curiously, Curtis continued to watch the steward as he opened the first bag. Then the steward suddenly straightened erect. He smiled at Curtis.

"If you will excuse me an instant, sir," he said above the noise of the loading crane winches.

Curtis nodded, and the steward moved off toward a deck cabin door. He turned, as the fellow disappeared inside, and looked back to where Jo still stood talking to Carlos Benevedas.

Jo caught his eye, that instant, and smilingly said something. Curtis didn't hear it, due to the noise of the winches. He frowned, moving slightly toward her, cupping his hand to his ear half humorously.

Jo started to repeat what she'd said, raising her voice, and Curtis took four more steps toward her, when he noticed that her words were suddenly frozen in a sharp exclamation of terror.

Bewildered, Curtis started toward her.

It was then that the huge packing case, loaded with small machinery parts, slipped from the loading crane and crashed loudly to the deck, a scant ten feet behind him.

Curtis wheeled, saw the broken case coverings, the scattered iron parts. The complete wreckage of his luggage. The case had fallen exactly on the spot where he'd been standing less than four seconds ago.

Something chill swept the spine of Allan Curtis as he stood there in horrified astonishment, gazing at the shattered packing case that might easily have crushed him lifeless to the deck.

His luggage, buried beneath the parts of the broken case, was almost unrecognizable. But as Curtis ran his tongue momentarily over suddenly dry lips, he realized that he'd made a life-saving trade.

THEN Jo was at his side, eyes wide with terror and relief, and Benevedas was behind her, his face white in horrified shock. Others who'd been moving around the deck were now crowding around, babbling in shrill excitement.

"Oh, thank God, Allan, thank God!" Jo said again and again.

"What good fortune, Señor," Benevedas exclaimed in relief and astonishment.

"It's all right," Curtis found himself saying calmly. "What might have been a fatal accident was fortunately

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avoided. That's all that matters. I can replace the luggage."

Then the steward, wide-eyed and crimson with surprise, was before him, apologizing profusely, begging to be of any possible service, assuring him of replacement of all baggage.

"It was terrible, sir. Ghastly. I saw the crane starting to lose hold on the crate as I came from the deck cabin. I tried to shout to you. The words choked in my throat. Please forgive the frightful occurrence, sir. I beg of you."

"It's all right," Curtis repeated. "I'll turn in a statement of the value of the luggage. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I'd like a drink. A rather stiff one."

On the way to the ship's bar, Benevedas was still muttering excitedly, breaking into Spanish now and then under the stress of his concern.

Jo had her hand lightly on Curtis' arm. And though she meant thus to calm him, it was she who trembled.

"What a hideous accident, what a horrible tragedy that almost was," she declared somewhat shakenly.

"Yes," Curtis answered. "It was almost the last, ah, er, accident in my life."

CHAPTER IV

A Rebuke for Carlos

WHEN Allan Curtis sauntered into the *Ventura's* main dining salon, some hours later, he saw that Jo Matthews was already seated at a corner table, chatting with the charming and debonair Carlos Benevedas.

The young Latin-American sprang to his feet with a flourish as Curtis approached.

"Greetings *Señor,*" he smiled. "The lovely *Señorita* and I were at the moment discussing your very fortunate escape this afternoon. It was truly remarkable."

"Yes, wasn't it," Curtis said. He sat down and glanced at Jo. "You look nice tonight. I've always liked you in that dress. What's good on the menu?"

Jo made a face at him.

"I suppose I should swoon over the fact that you've even noticed that I had a dress on," she said tartly. "And I'm glad you've *always* liked me in this dress because this is the first time I've worn it. As to the food tonight, the steak looks good."

Curtis grinned at her.

"Thanks. I'll try it. And I still like the dress."

Carlos sighed heavily.

"Ah! You Americans are so very, very casual about the beauty of your women. In my country we sing songs, we write poems, we compose glorious music to their charms."

"Sounds like a darn swell country," Jo said.

"And so it is, Señorita," Carlos said fervently.

Curtis looked up at the ardent Peruvian, a glint of interest in his eyes.

"How's the situation with Ecuador these days, Carlos? I don't keep up with the international situation as I should."

The young Peruvian shrugged hopelessly.

"The people of Ecuador and the people of Peru desire peace and harmony. Their leaders desire it. But always something happens to prevent the happy union of the two nations. That 'something' is the one thing that keeps the political situation of all South America disturbed and unsettled. Imagine what your own great country would be like if two of your States were quarreling among themselves. If Arizona and California had disputes for

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which there was no amicable settlement, it would affect the tranquillity of the entire nation. The happy settlement of the problems of Peru and Ecuador is the key to domestic tranquillity in South America."

"And that means that North and South America could present a united front against their common enemy," Jo said earnestly. She turned impulsively to Curtis. "Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing, Allan?"

CURTIS looked up from the menu. "What, Jo?"

"Oh, Allan," Jo said disgustedly, "you weren't even listening! Here you are, heading right into one of the most important sections of the world today, and all you've got on your mind is a lot of old relics and ruins."

"Well," Curtis said practically, "somebody's got to collect the relics. Might as well be me as the next person. Are you having the steak, too?"

Jo sighed despairingly.

"Yes, I suppose I'm having the steak."

"Good idea. By the way, Carlos what is this 'something' that keeps Peru and Ecuador at each other's throat? You see, I was listening after all."

"I do not know, *Señor*. But always it is something. Just when the gods are beginning to smile, 'something' happens to prevent a happy settlement. Trouble will break out unexpectedly. A Peruvian minister will be assassinated in Ecuador, or a band of Peruvian soldiers will be set on by Ecuadorian troops. Then there will be rioting and killing and more hatred is stored up in hearts of the people of both countries."

"It sounds very much to me," Jo said emphatically, "as if the whole thing might be Axis espionage. Don't you think so, Carlos?"

"It is difficult to prove, *Señorita*," Carlos replied gravely. "What do you think, *Señor* Curtis?"

"Oh, I don't know," Curtis said. "I never gave it much thought, I guess. Espionage has always seemed to me something that occurred in books for the most part."

"That," Jo said, "is a typical statement coming from you, Mr. Curtis. You can't see the storm signs until you're up to your neck in trouble."

"You're mixing your metaphors, Jo," Curtis said with a grin. "Let's mix something else for a change. How about a drink?"

"You're hopeless, I'm afraid," Jo said a little angrily. "So we might as—"

She let the sentence trail off uncompleted.

"What's the matter?" Curtis asked.

JO WAS looking over his shoulder to the main door of the dining room. Curtis twisted around curiously in his chair.

"It's nothing," Jo laughed. "My attention was distracted by that distinguished couple who've just entered. Do you know them?"

Curtis easily located the couple Jo refered to. The man was tall and blond with a hard, impassive face. The woman was also blonde, but her complexion was as clear and fine as a young girl's. There seemed to be something curiously detached about her, as if she wore an invisible cloak of enchanted mystery.

They stood under the archway of the door, seemingly oblivious to the comment their entrance had occasioned. The woman wore a black satin evening gown that revealed the shimmering grace of her lithe body, and the man was immaculately attired in formal evening clothes.

The woman murmured something to

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her companion and then she took his arm as they started into the dining salon.

"*Dios!*" Carlos said unexpectedly. "She is the one. It is impossible that I am mistaken!"

"Oh, do you know her?" Jo asked. "I was hoping there was some way to meet her. She looks very interesting."

"Why, of course I know her," Carlos said eagerly. "I met her in my own country a year ago. Would you like me to invite them over to our table?"

Curtis was leaning forward slightly and his lidded gaze was centered on the couple, who were being seated at a table on the opposite side of the room.

"Yes," he said softly, "bring them over, by all means."

Jo looked at him queerly.

"Don't tell me," she laughed, "that you've fallen for the mysterious blonde? It would serve you right to have your heart broken with a shipboard romance."

Curtis had settled back in his chair. The momentarily tense lines had faded from his face and he was smiling casually again.

"Nothing like that," he said. "I just thought it'd be fun to have a drink with them."

"It shall be done," Carlos said promptly.

He stood up, bowed charmingly to Jo and then marched across the floor to the distinguished couple's table.

Curtis was in a position to watch their faces as Carlos stepped to their table and bowed smilingly to the lady.

Not a flicker of recognition touched their features as they regarded the young Latin-American.

Curtis glanced at Jo. She, too, was watching the scene absorbedly.

CARLOS was speaking to them now, a bewildered expression on his face. The pale, blonde woman stared coldly at him for an instant, then turned and murmured something to her escort.

The man stood up and said something to Carlos.

Curtis was too far away to hear the remark, but he saw the dull flush of anger that stained the neck and face of the young Carlos Benevedas.

"What's up?" Jo asked.

Curtis didn't answer. Every atom of his attention was focused on the scene that was taking place at the other table.

Carlos was speaking now, directly to the woman, and Curtis could see that his hands were clenched into angry fists.

The woman's thick-shouldered, blond companion spoke sharply to Carlos, then imperiously summoned the head waiter.

His implication was obvious. With one last hot exclamation, Carlos wheeled and marched away from their table. He didn't return to Curtis and Jo, but strode out of the dining salon.

"Well!" Jo said. "Did you ever see anything like that?"

Curtis was absorbed in the menu again.

"Like what?" he inquired blandly.

"Why," Jo said indignantly, "those people cut poor Carlos dead. They acted as if they'd never seen him before."

"Maybe they hadn't," Curtis suggested. "Now, how about ordering our dinner?"

"I don't feel like eating now," Jo said. "Let's get some air."

Outside in the soft velvet of the Pacific night, Jo rested her arms moodily on the rail of the steamer and stared up into the starred heavens.

"That scene upset me," she said. "I'm sorry if I spoiled your dinner Curtis. It wasn't very considerate of me, was it?"

"Not a bit," Curtis said promptly.

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"I wonder who those people are?" Jo said.

"It doesn't matter, does it?"

Jo swung about to face him, her face a pale blur in the darkness.

"Honestly, Allan, you can be the most exasperating person in the world. This is a terrible way for a secretary to talk to her boss, but I feel it's for your own good. You don't notice anything that's going on, because you're so terribly wrapped up in your work. Even the international situation is just a big joke to you."

"It isn't always funny," Curtis said. He glanced up and down the dark deck and moved slightly away from the girl so that his back was protected by the converging corners of the companionway.

"I won't bite you," Jo said peevishly, as Curtis moved. "I'm going to my cabin. You won't have to worry about me anymore."

Curtis grinned at her.

"I wasn't thinking of the danger *you* hold."

CHAPTER V

The Corpse in Curtis' Cabin

HALF an hour later Allan Curtis was still standing in the shadows of the deck, his mind sorting and shuffling the events of the past six hours. Particularly his thoughts centered on the scene he had just witnessed between Carlos and the distinguished couple.

His contemplative smile was without humor as he flipped his cigarette into the air and watched its glowing tip fall through the darkness to the water.

In the game he was playing, a participant was generally allowed only one mistake. And Curtis had reason to believe that someone in the game had already made that mistake.

He turned slowly from the shadow of the companionway and, after a careful, yet casual glance in both directions, he sauntered back toward the passenger cabin section of the ship.

There was one young man he was very anxious to talk with. Carlos Benevedas should have something very interesting to say. . . .

He descended the broad carpeted stairway that led to the lower cabin decks and stopped before the door of his own stateroom.

The lighted corridor was deserted.

Curtis started to insert his key in the door, but it wasn't necessary. The door was ajar. Curtis frowned and glanced carefully up and down the empty corridor. He was certain that he had locked the door before leaving.

For an imperceptible instant he hesitated. If anyone were in his cabin, Curtis would provide a choice target for him when he opened the door and silhouetted himself against the glaring light of the corridor.

Cautiously he swung the door open about ten inches. Then, with a swift lithe motion, he slipped through the narrow aperture and slammed the door shut.

Back against the wall, hand in his coat pocket, he waited tensely. There was no sound in the cabin other than the heavy pumping of his own heart.

There was no sound, no sudden shot, no rustle of stealthy movement, but Curtis' keen senses perceived that something was radically wrong.

For a moment he remained motionless in the darkened cabin. Then he snapped on the light.

In the sudden illumination that flooded the room, Curtis saw the body of a man lying face downward on the floor, a long-handled knife protruding from his back.

Grimly Curtis knelt beside the

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twisted figure. He turned the man over gently and his face hardened as he recognized the death-distorted features of the handsome young Peruvian, Carlos Benevedas!

IN THE deathly silence of the cabin, Curtis stared at the body of the young Peruvian. His thoughts were churning swiftly, but his long, angular face was expressionlessly blank.

How long he knelt beside the dead man he had no way of knowing, but he was finally aroused by a footstep in the corridor.

He looked up just as the cabin door swung inward and a uniformed figure appeared. Curtis recognized the chunky, red-faced steward who's insistence on baggage inspection earlier that day had almost caused his accidental death.

The cold blue eyes of the steward took in the scene carefully. His scarred chin moved as he said,

"Accident, sir?"

Curtis didn't answer immediately. He stood up slowly, giving himself time to think. This was the man who had been the indirect means of his almost losing his life when the packing crate had crashed to the deck that afternoon. It had been this steward who had led him to that particular spot of the deck. Now he was on hand again, miraculously materializing at another serious occurrence.

"I don't think it was an accident," Curtis answered at last. "It isn't possible to stab a man in the back by accident."

"Isn't it, sir?"

Curtis said, "Get the captain and the ship's doctor."

The steward hesitated.

"I'll ring for them from here," he said. "I don't think it would be right for me to leave."

Curtis smiled grimly. He knew what the man was getting at, but he determined to force his hand.

"Why?" he snapped.

The steward faced him stolidly, not a flicker of emotion on his face.

"I must see that you do not leave, sir," he said.

"Are you accusing me of this murder?" Curtis demanded.

"I am doing nothing but my duty," the steward replied. "You must realize that the circumstances are suspicious."

Curtis relaxed then. He had learned what he wanted. He let a helpless look spread over his face.

"Oh my God," he said. "I see what you mean. But this is so silly! I didn't kill the man. By all means ring for the captain."

THE captain arrived a few moments later. Curtis was seated in a chair smoking nervously. The steward was standing carefully beside the body, his expression impassive as stone.

The captain was a tall, florid-faced sea dog, with tufts of white hair sticking up ludicrously from his pink scalp.

He took in the scene with one sweeping glance and listened in silence while the steward told him what had happened.

Then he turned to Curtis.

"Mr. Curtis," he said, folding his arms and squinting down at him. "What do you have to say?"

"Not much," Curtis said. "I came to my cabin a few moments ago and found this man lying here on the floor with a knife sticking out of his back. While I was kneeling beside the body, the door opened and this steward walked in. That's all there is to tell."

The captain stroked his chin and frowned.

"Did you know young Benevedas?"

"Not well," Curtis said. "I met him

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for the first time today."

"Did you dislike him?"

"I told you I hardly knew the man. He seemed very charming and agreeable. I can't understand who would want to kill him."

He glanced helplessly at his clenched hands and then said suddenly.

"Steward, how did you happen to come to my cabin tonight? What prompted you to stop in here?"

He looked up and saw the faint shine of perspiration that beaded the stocky steward's brow. His sudden shot had caught him off balance.

"I—I was walking through the corridor. I thought I heard a noise. I stopped to investigate."

"Oh, I see," Curtis said. "That explains it."

The steward, Curtis knew, was lying. Somehow, he was mixed in this affair.

The captain said,

"Mr. Curtis this is a serious affair. Until we definitely discover the murderer of young Benevedas, I shall be forced to insist that you remain in cabin custody."

Curtis was silent as the captain talked on about the necessity of taking every precaution to apprehend the killer. He was thinking of what it would mean if he were delayed at docking by Peruvian officials, if he were forced to kill time while the routine of a police investigation were carried through.

It would mean—

"I UNDERSTAND your position, Captain," he smiled suddenly. "I won't make things any more difficult. You can depend on me to stick to my cabin."

"We'll have to post a guard, you understand," the captain said. "It's a formality, but a necessary one. The Line is not accusing you nor anyone else. That's not our job. We're just following orders. You'll have your meals here. I'll send for the doctor now and get—ah—things cleaned up here."

"I would appreciate it," Curtis said, "if you would notify Miss Matthews, my secretary, about the state of affairs. If possible, I would like to talk to her about our work."

"I think that can be arranged," the captain said. "I'll inform her myself of this—ahem—accident."

"Pardon me, sir," the steward said, "but I feel it my duty to report that Señor Benevedas dined with Mr. Curtis' secretary tonight. Also that he left suddenly shortly after Mr. Curtis arrived. Señor Benevedas seemed quite angry as he left the dining salon."

"Just what are you implying?" Curtis demanded. "That Carlos Benevedas and I were fighting over Miss Matthews' affections?"

"I do not imply anything," the steward said respectfully. "I only tell what happened."

"What about this, Curtis?" the captain asked. "Any bad blood between you and Benevedas?"

"None at all," Curtis said.

He realized he was in an uncomfortable spot, but he now knew definitely the steward's role in the situation. The steward's anxiety to add to the evidence against him, was definite proof that he was involved.

He smiled at the man as he moved with the captain to the door.

"Thanks," he said, grinning. "You've told me just what I wanted to know."

The steward's face was gloatingly triumphant as he closed the door.

CHAPTER VI

An "Escape"

IT WAS almost an hour later when Jo Matthews, breathless and white-

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faced, arrived at the cabin to which her employer had been confined.

She found a guard posted outside the stateroom and, inside, Allan Curtis striding nervously back and forth before his bunk, taking deep and frequent draughts from a cigarette.

"Oh, Allan," she exclaimed, distraught. "Is it really true? They told me Carlos Bene—"

"Yes," Curtis cut in quietly. "Yes, Carlos was murdered. I found him in my room, stabbed in the back. A steward, the same one who started to inspect my luggage before the almost-accident this afternoon, burst into my cabin while I was kneeling over the body."

Jo's face was bewildered, frightened.

"That's horrible," she gasped. "But surely they can't think that you—"

Again Curtis cut in, pausing in his pacing.

"My friend the steward summoned the captain immediately. Then, before I knew it, he was implying to the captain that I had a quarrel with Carlos over his attenions to you, and that young Benevedas left the dining salon in a rage."

"But surely the captain didn't believe—"

Once more Curtis interrupted her.

"I don't know what the captain believed," he said. "I don't think he took what the steward said with any too much consideration. But I was found with a man who was slain in my cabin stateroom. Any further investigation of the matter until we reach port is beyond possibility. The Peruvian authorities will take charge when we dock. In the meantime, being the solitary suspect of any sort, they feel obliged to keep me in a sort of semi-gracious custody."

"Oh, Allan," Jo cried, dropping to a lounge chair and putting a slim hand on her forehead. "This is simply frightful! Poor, poor Carlos — they can't think that you'd have reason to kill him. You only met him for the first time less than ten hours ago!"

"All that will be proved," Allan said. "I'm not worried about my ability to prove I had nothing to do with it."

Relief shone on Jo's face.

"Then you're sure they won't try to embroil you in it?"

Curtis crushed out his cigarette.

"No," he said assuredly, "they'll merely have a brief investigation and release me."

Jo rose.

"Then why," she asked, "do you seem so visibly agitated? Why were you pacing the stateroom like a furious bear when I entered?"

Curtis looked at her wordlessly for an instant, as if debating his answer. Then he removed his horn-rimmed spectacles, placed them in his pocket, and took out a handkerchief with which he mopped his brow.

"I am anxious," he said, "over the costly delay this will mean to our expedition."

JO LOOKED at him with what almost amounted to incredulity. She shook her head slowly from side to side, as if refusing to believe what she'd heard.

"Allan," she declared, "I don't think you'll ever fall out of character, even for an instant. Murder occurs, you are involved, placed in custody—and yet your only worry, your only apparent concern, is the delay it will cause your precious prowling about in dusty, ancient ruins!"

Curtis grinned at this biting characterization of himself. He shrugged.

"As I told you not so long ago, Jo," he declared, "the real importance of things is merely relative—depending on

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how you view them."

Jo Matthews sighed.

"Sometimes I think I know you better than anyone on earth, Allan. And then—" she left the sentence trailing, almost despairingly.

Curtis moved to her side, placed his hand reassuringly on her shoulder.

"Don't worry about anything more, Jo," he said gently. "This will all be merely routine." Again, on his face there was the momentary suggestion that he was deliberating if he should say anything further. And again, he seemed to decide against his emotion with his answer.

"Good night, Jo," he said lamely. "Don't worry. I wish you'd drop in here tomorrow morning after breakfast. I'm turning in for some rest now. This day has been much more full than I'd expected it to."

Jo looked up at him, the perfume of her auburn hair coming suddenly to his nostrils. In her eyes there was bewilderment. On her lovely lips a half-formed question.

"Good night, Jo," Curtis repeated.

Jo Matthew's white young shoulders suddenly slumped.

"Good night, Allan," she murmured.

Only his eyes betraying the conflict of emotions within him, Curtis Allan watched the girl leave the stateroom. He sighed, then, and walking to the portholes, quietly shaded them. Then he removed his coat.

With a half smile of dry amusement at the fact that no one had bothered to search him before he was confined to the cabin stateroom, Curtis removed his shoulder holster, took the automatic pistol from its leather sheath, and carefully placed it under his pillow.

Then he continued disrobing. . . .

IT WAS almost noon of the following morning when Allan Curtis woke. The sunlight streamed into his cabin stateroom, giving it a warm cheerfulness that for the first brief moments of waking awareness almost obliterated the danger he knew lay ahead.

Half an hour later, Curtis breakfasted, and after that talked once again to Jo Matthews. Later, at his own request, he had no more visitors in his "prison," and spent the time until dinner perusing navigational volumes he found beside his berth.

Jo Matthews dined with him in his cabin, and their conversation was sparsely sprinkled through the course of the meal and the moments they spent together after that. On more than one occasion, sensing the mood of bewildered disappointment that had fallen over Jo, Curtis was forced to hold back any information he might have wanted to proffer.

And when Jo left that night, it was wordlessly, almost dejectedly. Curtis, however, shortly after her departure, stepped to the door of his cabin and had a brief, urgent conversation with the sailor who stood on guard outside.

It was the second such conversation that Curtis had had with the lean, clear-eyed sailor that day. They made certain they were not overheard, and were unobserved.

When darkness blanketed the skies and water that surrounded the ship, Curtis observed with satisfaction that this would be a moonless night. Then he retired, fully dressed, and slept three hours. . . .

THE hand and voice of the sailor who had been on guard outside his cabin, awakened Allan Curtis.

"It's almost time," the sailor declared in a voice reminiscent of Brooklyn. "We're off the coastal regions already."

Curtis opened his eyes, focusing them

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in the darkness of the cabin. Then he rose, making certain his automatic was still holstered at his shoulder.

"You have the Jacob's ladder ready?" Curtis whispered.

The sailor nodded.

"All set. It will approach from starboard."

"How about the watch?" Curtis demanded.

"Pheno-barbital in their coffees. Toured the watches. All sound asleep," the sailor answered.

"Good," Curtis said. "And the bridge?"

"First and third officers on duty. Helmsman too. They won't catch the approach of the launch."

Curtis moved toward the door. The sailor followed him. Out on the deserted deck, under the heavy blanket of the starless night, Curtis drew his automatic pistol. He turned to the sailor.

"Excellent work. I didn't know you chaps were quite so efficient. Hope this doesn't end your usefulness."

The "sailor" grinned. "I'm due to be sent to the east coast to work pretty soon. The Chief'll probably make my transfer after this."

Curtis grinned back at him.

"You look nothing like an intelligence operative," he observed.

"If I looked like one, I wouldn't be a useful one for long," the "sailor" smiled.

Curtis started along the darkened deck. At the railing, twenty feet later, he paused beside the shipboard end of a hemp ladder. It was knotted securely to a brace of rail davits.

Looking over the side, Curtis saw the length of the ladder trailing far down the steel sides of the vessel, almost to water edge.

"Long climb," the "sailor" observed dryly.

Curtis nodded grimly, his eyes searching the darkened reaches of the waters out there.

"I think I hear them faintly," he said.

The "sailor" stopped to listen. Then he nodded. "Keen ears, Curtis. That's the launch."

He pulled forth a tiny flashlight, and covering it with his hand, he flicked it on. A tiny pinpoint of light flickered several times as the "sailor" signaled. He stopped, waiting.

The faint muffled throb of a small motored boat was more audible now. And from the blackened reaches of the water off there, an answering pinpoint of light flashed twice.

"Everything ready," said the "sailor." He held out his hand. "The best of luck."

Curtis smiled.

"Thanks, and to you, also."

"I'LL head up to the bridge now to create your diversion," the "sailor" said. "For God's sake, make it speedy. Don't tarry. I won't be able to carry the bluff long."

"I won't," Curtis promised. The "sailor" turned, disappearing up a companionway. Curtis watched until he was gone. Then he turned his gaze back out over the railing to that darkened stretch of water. He could tell, now, that the motor power of the launch out there had been cut, and that the pilot was playing the skillful, though dangerous, game of drifting his tiny craft at angle to the huge ship's forward motion.

Curtis could barely make out the outlines of the tiny motor launch on the moonless waters. It was a roofed cabin craft, no more than twenty feet long.

And suddenly Curtis heard the muffled exclamation behind him.

"Allan!"

Curtis wheeled, automatic in hand. He faced Jo Matthews!

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Her eyes widened as she saw the gun in his hand, the rope ladder tied to the rail davits. Her lovely lips parted in fear.

"Allan," she whispered huskily, "have you lost your mind? What are you doing?"

"Get back to your cabin, Jo, for God's sakes," Curtis whispered fiercely. "Quickly!"

"But, Allan," Jo protested whitely, bewilderedly, "you mustn't try to run from them. They'll never implicate you in that murder. Don't you see how foolish this is? Please, Allan, listen to—"

Curtis looked sharply over his shoulder and over the rail. The small launch was drifting to the side of the ship rapidly as the *Ventura* moved ahead through the tranquil waters.

He made his next dcision in a split second, as swiftly as he realized there was no other alternative. He holstered his gun.

Stepping toward Jo with amazing alacrity, Curtis swept her up off her feet and into his arms. Then grabbing the davit lines for support, he swung up on the railing of the ship, teetering there for an instant, finding footing on the first rung of the hemp ladder which swung sickeningly down to the water below. He saw the tiny launch swinging closer now.

Precariously, then, Curtis started slowly down the swaying ladder of hemp. Dizzily bobbing at the bottom, far below, was the drifting motor launch.

Rung by rung, Curtis inched down the ladder, his body streaked with sweat, his arm cable-like around Jo Matthews.

And then, at last, he was at the bottom, while the wash from the prow of the ship frothed inches below his feet.

A grappling gaff, held in a sinewy black arm, extended from the launch and caught the hooks fast in the hemp ladder. Slowly, and with tremendous strength, the arm pulled the tiny craft in toward the ladder until it was at last only three scant feet away.

Curtis released his hold on the ladder, springing toward the bobbing deck of the small motor launch. He landed on his feet, Jo still in his arms.

A massive, powerfully-muscled negro stood there in the small roofed space of the launch deck, one hand on the helm, the other still clinging to the gaff hook. He smiled briefly, whitely, at Allan.

And then Allan let Jo gently down to the deck. Springing to the side of the gigantic negro, he grabbed the gaff hook, freed it from the hemp ladder, and fended the tiny launch away from the side of the huge steamer.

UNDER the expert hands of the negro, the motor of the launch snarled to life. Swiftly, he spun the wheel, turning the craft about. Then the motor launch, under full power, was surging away from the steamship.

Curtis turned to the huge negro, extending his hand.

"Well done, Juan," he declared.

The giant negro, wearing only an oily pair of white sailor's dungaree pants, cuff legs rolled slightly, revealing bare feet, grinned. He wore a gun and cartridge belt on his lean hips.

"Welcome back, *Amigo* Curtis. It been long time since I guide you."

Jo Matthews had taken a place in the stern of the craft, her eyes filled with wonder as she gazed at Curtis and the negro. There was a curiously pleased, almost awe-inspired look in her eyes.

"Thanks, Juan," Curtis said. Then, glancing about, he asked: "Where is the pilot of this launch, the little Scot, McAndrews?"

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Juan shook his head. His expression was suddenly grim.

"He come in at beachhead, for pick up Juan. Then we to meet you. But my expedition party, twent' boys, run into ambush there, just as launch come in. McAndrews among those dead."

Curtis cursed under his breath.

"Ambush?" he asked. "Who ambushed your party?"

Juan shrugged.

"We no know. Not expect it. But see strange signs on way to jungle from Lima."

"How many boys have you left for our trek?" Curtis asked.

"Four," said Juan. "Five with me."

Again Curtis cursed, desperately.

"And McAndrews, too," he muttered savagely. He turned and went back to the stern where Jo sat silently.

"I had intended originally to keep you out of this mess, Jo," he said. "You were just a front, to make my so-called expedition look more realistic. I was to meet this boat no matter what happened aboard the *Ventura*. I never intended to dock at port. But at least I'd thought you'd be safe."

Jo started to speak, but Curtis cut her off.

"Even a few minutes ago, when you blundered on me making my exit over the rail, I had no choice but to take you along to keep you from delaying me and possibly unwittingly spreading an alarm. But I'd thought that the pilot of this launch, a McAndrews, would take you back to Lima once he'd landed me on the beachhead. I figured poorly, Jo. McAndrews has been killed. There'll be no one to take this launch back to Lima. We'll have to scuttle it." He paused gravely. "I don't know what I'll have to do with you."

"You haven't told me what this is about, Allan," Jo said quietly. "But I won't stand in your way. Do as you please. I . . . I'm sorry I had to . . . to interfere as much as I must have. Can't I make it back to Lima alone?"

Curtis laughed humorlessly.

"Through countless miles of trackless jungle?" He shook his head. "Natives could hardly make it afoot, let alone a white girl unaided."

"I'm sorry Allan," Jo said softly.

"Forget it," Curtis said briefly. Then he turned away to rejoin Juan at the helm. Over his shoulder, he paused to say, "I'll think of something, some way. I have to."

"We no go back to beachhead," Juan said to Curtis. "Ambush party maybe there yet. Me leave four boys in cove, two mile up coast. We took cover in cove. Then I took boat, met you like plan."

Curtis nodded grimly.

"Thank God we've still four of them left, at any rate," he said. "How long did it take you to reach the beachhead from Lima?"

"Four day," Juan said proudly. "Travel like *los diablos*."

Curtis fished for a cigarette, eyes grimly knifing the darkness at the approaching jungle coastline. A verdant, tropical smell was already in the warm sea air. . . .

CHAPTER VII

A Jungle Trap

THE motor faded away into silence as the launch coasted into a narrow, small-beached cove. Ahead of them, the shore line was an uninviting bulk in the deep blackness of the night. Except for the occasional, marrow-chilling scream of a soaring bird, not a sound welcomed their arrival.

When the bottom of the boat scraped against the sandy beach. Curtis jumped ashore and fastened the painter line to

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the bole of a tree.

Sloshing back through the warm, gently swelling water, he held out his arms for Jo.

"Come on, Kid," he said. "You're in for a tough enough time as it is, without starting things off thoroughly soaked."

"All right," Jo said meekly.

Curtis put one arm around her waist and lifted her over the gunwale of the boat and carried her ashore. Juan splashed after them.

Curtis set Jo down and turned to Juan.

"How many of the expedition did you say escaped with you?" he asked.

"Four, Amigo," Juan answered. "They are very much afraid. Now they are hiding in the bush."

"Get them," Curtis ordered. "We've got to get moving as soon as possible."

Juan nodded and moved off, his oily dungarees a white blur in the darkness. Soon he disappeared into the foreboddingly dark bush that grew in a tangled mass up to the beach.

"Allan," Jo said in a small voice, "I know now I haven't been much help to you. I still don't understand what's going on, but I realize I've been completely blind in judging you. You're not at all the person I thought you were and I'm—I'm glad."

"Thanks for the endorsement," Curtis said. "But this is a mighty tough spot I've landed you in. I can't send you back to Lima now because my pilot, McAndrews, is dead. You've got to stick with me, and the things I'm heading for aren't exactly pleasant. Are you game?"

"I'll go anywhere with you, Allan," Jo said instantly, "but the suspense is absolutely killing me. Isn't there anything you can tell me that will set my female curiosity at ease?"

"Not a great deal," Curtis said. "I'm here because I know this country, as you once pointed out, like my own backyard. The government sent me here to do a very special job, but I can't give you any of the details. If we find what I'm looking for, you'll know the whole story immediately. That enough?"

JO'S eyes were shining in the darkness.

"That's perfect, Allan. I know that what you're doing is necessary and important and I know you can do the job better than any man in the world."

"That's a large statement," Curtis said. "Especially when you don't know how tough this job is liable to be. I don't mind for myself, but I feel guilty about dragging you into this hell-hole of danger. We've got a long trek ahead of us and there are some very nasty obstacles in the way of our objective. Then there's the highly important problem of getting back alive. I'm not trying to scare you, but I'd feel a little better knowing that you're going into this thing with your eyes open."

Jo looked at him steadily.

"I'm seeing things more clearly than I ever remember," she said softly.

Juan returned then driving four small, wizened, dark natives ahead of him. The four men were completely terrified.

Curtis saw the rolling whites of their eyes, the desperate glances they flung about, and he knew that they were not likely to prove of much use.

"What's the matter with them?" he demanded of Juan.

Juan shrugged his massive shoulders. The glance he directed at the four cringing natives was full of scorn.

"Amigo," he said, "they are from the bush and they are very much afraid. They do not want to go into the jungle and if they don't, I break their heads open like a rotten fruit."

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Curtis looked from the terrified natives to Juan.

"I told you to get men who weren't afraid of bullets," he said sharply. "If a few rifle volleys did this to them, how do you think they'd react if they ran into a machine gun?"

"It is not the bullets," Juan said quickly. "Those they do not mind."

"Then what's the matter?" Curtis demanded.

"It is the foolish old men's tales they have been listening to," Juan said with great indignation. "I have told them it is only the nonsense, but they will not listen. I knock them to the ground, but it does not help. They are still afraid of the snake god, Sacha, and her daughter. It is much foolishness."

CURTIS sighed despairingly. The four natives had crouched close to the ground when Juan had mentioned the word, "Sacha," and their terrified moans sounded like the wind in the tree tops.

"Allan," Jo whispered, "what's it all about?"

Curtis looked disgustedly at the frightened natives.

"A lot of superstitious stupidity," he said savagely. "I've heard a thousand variations of the snake god legend, none of which make sense. These are the first natives I've ever encountered who paid any attention to the story. It seems there's supposed to be a huge snake in the Peruvian jungles who rescued the people from the Spaniards centuries ago. The natives call the snake Sacha. There's another part of the legend that gives Sacha a daughter, a girl who rides the beast and answers the entreaty of her countrymen who are in need. It's been years since I've even heard a mention of the silly story. Who's been pouring tales into their ears, Juan?"

"No one, amigo," Juan answered. "They are big fools all by themselves. Not far from here they have seen the tracks of the snake god and they are afraid."

"The tracks of the snake god!" Curtis repeated sharply. "What are you talking about, Juan? Do you believe in this story?"

"Me?" Juan said indignantly. "Very much not. But Juan has seen the tracks also."

"So you've seen the tracks," Curtis said grimly. "Where?"

"Deep in the jungle. For many miles the tracks twist and turn through the jungle. Trees are knocked down, bushes are torn up by the roots. The tracks you cannot miss. It is all very foolish," Juan finished somewhat uneasily.

"Tracks or not," Curtis said, "we head into the jungle at sun-up. Now try and talk some sense into your boys."

IN THE pale light of breaking dawn the results of Juan's efforts were apparent. The four natives had disappeared completely.

Juan roved up and down the shore line seeking their trail, but it was hopeless search. He came back to Curtis shaking his big head like an angry dog.

"When I find them," he said wrathfully, "I break their afraid heads in my hands like a twig."

"We'll be better off without them," Curtis said. "Get the gear from the launch. We're ready to go."

Juan passed the knapsacks of provisions from the compartments of the launch to Curtis who carried them to the beach. When the supplies were removed, Juan asked:

"What we do with the boat?"

"Scuttle it," Curtis said. "Jerk the stops before you leave. If someone stumbled on it here it'd be like an ar-

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row pointing to the path we took."

In twenty minutes the small launch had drifted from the cove and was settling. Curtis and Juan slung heavy packs to their shoulders and, with Jo in the middle, they filed into the dark jungle.

They trudged through the thick bush, Juan in the lead, hacking at the clinging trailers, until the sun had moved high in the heavens.

It was during their first rest halt that they heard the airplane.

The noise of its motor was like the droning of a giant fly high in the heavens. Curtis shaded his eyes with his hand and searched the sky until he located the plane, a gleaming white speck against the white backdrop of a cloud.

Flying high, it swung over them in several long crisscrosses before it finally disappeared into the sun.

Curtis glanced briefly at Juan.

"We'd better be moving," he said.

Jo stood up quickly.

"I'm ready," she announced.

Her dress was torn in several places and smudges of dust streaked her cheeks, but her smile was bright.

"Good kid," Curtis said.

AGAIN they marched on. That afternoon two more planes flew over them at an altitude of only a few hundred feet.

Curtis followed their flight with his eyes, a worried line furrowing his forehead.

"Allan," Jo asked suddenly. "What planes are those?"

"Can't tell," Curtis answered. "Their insignia has been painted over. Let's keep moving."

In another hour they came to a fork in the narrow trail and Juan cried suddenly:

"See, amigo! Ahead of us is the track of the snake god. Where the trees are knocked aside and the bush torn up is the track of Sacha."

The face of the big black native oddly strained and his hand was clenched around the butt of his hip-holstered automatic. With his other hand he pointed, half-fearfully, half-triumphantly, down the trail.

Without speaking Curtis moved down the trail toward the section of the jungle that had been ripped apart, as if by the passing of a giant monster.

Curtis studied the shattered trees and crushed underbrush carefully. The swath cut across the trail they were following at right angles, and wound away into the dense fastness of the jungle.

Something *had* passed here, knocking trees aside and tearing up the matted jungle floor—but it hadn't been a mythical snake god!

Curtis' eyes narrowed and a worried frown tugged at his lips.

Juan was looking uneasily at the sundered jungle path.

"You see," he said, "it is as I have said."

"Have you seen many of these tracks?" Curtis asked.

"Very many," Juan answered. "All through the jungle. Sacha is everywhere."

Curtis smiled tightly.

"Don't blame this on your snake god, Juan. These tracks were made by armored tanks."

"Tanks?" Jo said incredulously, "are you sure, Allan?"

"Certainly. It's as plain as the nose on Juan's face. Look at the way the bark has been scraped clean from the trees. And look at the imprint of the treads on the ground. These tracks were made by tanks, about twenty-five tonners, I'd guess."

Juan looked dubiously at the tracks, but there was an expression of relief in his eyes.

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"Ah, yes," he said. "It is so easy to see."

"Then let's be moving," Curtis said. "We've got a long trek ahead of us."

THEY continued on until the swiftly falling jungle night made further travel impossible. Then they made a swift camp, ate their frugal rations and turned in.

In the morning before the first slanting lances of the sun cut through the dusky dawn, they were on their way again, driving deeper and deeper into the mysterious, foreboding fastness of the tangled jungle.

Again they heard the distant droning of planes and soon they could see four slim fighters lazily circling overhead. As they watched, one of the planes banked slowly and started down in a long glide. At a hundred feet the plane pulled out of the dive and flashed over them, so close that they could see details of the camouflaged fuselage.

The three remaining planes banked and dove after the leader. Curtis swore softly.

It was impossible to tell whether they had been seen. The leafy roof of the tall jungle shrouded the trail completely, and at the speed the planes were traveling it would have been nearly impossible for their pilots to see the trail or the small party.

Still—

Watching with narrowed eyes Curtis saw the planes pull out of their steep dives and climb again into the sky. The wings of the leader plane waggled slowly and the small formation banked and thundered away.

"What does it mean?" Jo asked worriedly. "It seems almost like they're looking for us."

Curtis swung his pack to his shoulder without answering.

"Let's go," he said.

In silence the small party continued their march. Throughout the rest of the morning the sky was empty of planes, but after their brief stop for lunch, they saw one single plane, flying thousands of feet above them, heading west.

Curtis studied the terrain over which they passed carefully now. A queer uneasiness disturbed him, as his eyes probed the still, silent forests.

Juan noticed something too, for his glance swung restlessly from side to side.

THE deep depths of the jungle were quiet now, as the small party fought their way along the ever-narrowing trail. Ahead of them the path they were following converged with another trail that branched off at right angles.

Juan, in the lead, hacked savagely at the trailing creepers and the thick underbrush that tore at their clothing.

"How much longer?" Jo panted. "I feel like I've been walking for ages."

"Keep your chin up for a while longer," Curtis said.

When they reached the right-angling branch of the trail, Curtis stopped and looked about. The convergence of the two trails formed a small natural clearing about fifty yards in diameter.

Here Curtis stopped.

"We're rather close to our objective," he said, "so we can rest here for a while."

They moved ahead to the center of the clearing. Curtis felt the peculiar prickling premonition again, as he unslung his pack and dropped it to the ground.

Nervously he glanced about the clearing. It was late afternoon and the shadows of the dense trees threw flickering areas of darkness over the shrub-like bushes. Everything was quiet.

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He noticed for the first time then that the shrill, almost incessant screams of the birds had ceased, and that the silence that had settled over the jungle was frighteningly unnatural.

His hand dropped instinctively to his gun.

"Juan," he said softly, "I think we had better start back. I don't like the looks of things."

"Allan," Jo said anxiously, "what's wrong?"

"I don't know," he said, in a low voice, "but I think I've found out all I need to know. We haven't any time to waste. Hurry!"

He was bending down for his pack, when he heard the sudden cracking, rustling noise in the bushes.

On one knee, he froze. His eyes flicked swiftly about the circle formed by the clearing, and he drew his gun slowly.

Suddenly through the dark depths of the underbrush he saw the flash of metal, and the vague shadows of moving shapes.

Jo crouched close to him, and he put his free arm about her shoulders.

"Don't be afraid, Honey," he whispered.

He raised his gun and backed carefully toward the narrow trail that had led them to this clearing.

Juan was at his side, crouched low, his big hand closed over his gun.

"Don't be fools!" a harsh voice behind them said suddenly. "You are covered from every side."

AT the sound of the strident, commanding voice, there was a sudden threshing sound from the underbrush that circled the clearing, and from the tangled depths of the jungles a dozen uniformed soldiers suddenly emerged, their rifles pointed unwaveringly at them.

"Be sensible," the harsh voice continued. "Throw your weapons into the center of the clearing. If you delay I will order my men to fire."

Curtis felt Jo trembling in his arms.

"Chin up," he said.

His eyes swung over the semi-circle of tough, hard-bitten soldiers who covered them so completely with their weapons. Resistance was not only futile, it was impossible. The soldiers were obviously Nazi, and they looked anxious to use the rifles they held so grimly in their hands.

"Throw down your weapons!" the harsh voice snapped. "I give you but one more chance."

Slowly Curtis lowered his gun and tossed it into the center of the clearing.

"Drop your gun, Juan," he told the big native.

With a contemptuous flip Juan tossed the gun after Curtis'.

"I do not need the gun," he said grimly. "If I get these hands of mine on their necks."

Curtis stood motionless as a slim, arrogant German officer stepped around him and regarded him with mocking eyes.

"May I ask the meaning of this attack?" Curtis said calmly. "We are a legally licensed archeological expedition and as such, have the right to explore this territory."

"Have you?" the German officer said coldly.

He waved his hand and a tall thickset blond fellow stepped from a place of concealment in the tangled shrubbery, and advanced.

Curtis stiffened slightly.

This man's eyes raked mockingly over Curtis and Jo, before he turned to the German officer.

"This is the man," he said. "I do not know about the girl. She traveled as his secretary."

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"Good," the officer snapped. "So?" he wheeled to Curtis, "It is just an exploring expedition, is it?"

The heavy-set blond with the soft amused blue eyes checked the officer with an upraised hand.

"I will handle this, Captain Brach. I believe that Mr. Curtiss will more fully appreciate the situation if I explain it to him. After all we both speak the same language. We can speak as one foreign agent to another, can we not, Mr. Curtiss?"

CURTIS regarded the man thoughtfully. This man, he knew, was the same whom he had seen on board the *Ventura,* in company with the mysteriously beautiful woman.

"Permit me to introduce myself," the German agent said politely. "I am Kurt von Wessel. My job was to prevent your arriving here, Mr. Curtis. Happily, I have succeeded, though you did manage to give me the slip from the *Ventura.* That was very clever of you, I must say."

"Thank you," Curtis said quietly. "I imagine it was especially annoying after you had gone to the trouble of murdering Carlos Benevedas and implicating me as the guilty party. That was to give you time to slip away from me at Lima, was it not?"

"Yes," von Wessel admitted, smiling. "I didn't think that you were planning to jump ship so unobtrusively. You forced me to alter my plans a bit. I was forced to fly here and warn the garrison of your whereabouts. Our planes located your party early this morning. Since then we have been expecting you quite patiently."

Curtis shrugged wearily.

"Since you've won the little game we were playing, would it hurt to tell me just what the whole program is? After all, I don't imagine I'll be taking the information back with me."

"No," von Wessel smiled, "you won't be taking anything back with you. There is no harm in telling you that for several months Germany has been infiltrating troops into this country. We have the nucleus of a complete armored division gathered here in the abandoned ruins of an ancient Incan city. At the proper moment these forces, together with a band of Peruvian renegades, will strike at the capital of the country, Lima. Imagine, if you can, the effect on Hemispheric Solidarity, when the government of Peru is controlled from Berlin."

"Very neat," Curtis said grimly. "It was what the American state department feared."

Captain Brach stepped forward.

"We must return to our encampment," he said. "If you are through with the prisoners, Herr von Wessel, I will have them escorted to their cells."

Von Wessel smiled coldly.

"I am through with them," he said softly.

CHAPTER VIII

Maria Again

THE improvised cell to which Curtis, Jo, and the massive Juan were taken, was little more than a small, dank cave, situated in what had once been the heart of the ancient Inca city.

Through a small square aperture in the ceiling, and a similar foot-square slot in the right wall, a scant supply of sticky tropical air was admitted.

The only entrance and exit to the narrow little cave was covered by a thick-slabbed stone door, which the uniformed soldiers of Captain Brach slid into place.

Then the three heard the footsteps outside moving away until there was no more sound.

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In the murky darkness of the cave, Curtis struck a match. Then, holding it aloft, he moved slowly about their confinement. His sharp exclamation was punctuated by sudden darkness as the match flickered out.

"It's all right," his voice came through the darkness to Jo and Juan. "I've found an old candle stub in a wall niche here."

There was the scraping of another match. Then illumination. Curtis lighted the candle, which sputtered at first, then flamed to a steady glow that drove the darkness from all save the smallest corners of the tiny cave.

"Not exactly what Edison had in mind when he first began puttering around," Curtis observed, "but it's something."

Jaun was busy at the stone door that barred their exit, his huge muscles knotting as he searched for leverage on its worn surface.

Jo crossed to Curtis.

"It's just about all over, isn't it, Allan?" she asked softly. There was no trace of fear in her voice.

Curtis shook his head.

"Perhaps," he admitted, "but it won't actually be over until we admit we're licked. I'm not conceding anything yet."

"This ancient Inca city, Allan," Jo asked, "have you been here before?"

Curtis shook his head.

"I've been in this territory, Jo, but never found the city until now. Several expeditions had tried to find it, unsuccessfully, of course. A few of us knew it was here. In the ancient Inca civilization this was called Sacha."

"And that's the basis of the snake god legend?" Jo asked.

Curtis nodded.

"Part of it. The queen who ruled this city was supposed to have escaped with the great snake Sacha when it was sacked and razed by a maurading band of conquistadors. The snake and the queen were supposed to have taken refuge in the jungles, returning to dwell alone in the city after the Spaniards had left it in ruins."

Jo shuddered.

"Well, you've found it full of minor snakes now," she observed.

Curtis nodded soberly.

"And somehow, Jo, these snakes have to be crushed before they have a chance to touch off the revolt that will crush all South America under the coils of the Axis."

JUAN came back from the door. His black brow was shiny with sweat. He shook his head.

"The door no move, amigo," he declared.

Curtis shook his head.

"I didn't think it would. It probably can only be opened from the other side. Undoubtedly it operates on Inca lever theory. Clever people, those ancients."

Juan looked patiently at Curtis. There was complete faith in his expression, as though he were certain his amigo would inevitably bring forth a solution to their troubles.

Curtis interpreted this glance for what it was. He smiled ruefully.

"No ideas as yet, Juan. We're in a tight one, this time."

Juan grinned confidently, shrugged, and went over into a corner where he sat down on the dank stones of the floor.

"Juan has the right idea," Curtis said to Joe. "Standing up, pacing back and forth, will only wear us out. Let's relax. We'll need all our strength."

He moved over to the side of the wall and sat down, leaning his back against the stones. Jo sat down beside him.

"You can tell me, Allan," Jo said.

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"Eh?" Curtis looked at her, eyebrows raised.

"We aren't being held here as prisoners, Allan. I know that much," Jo answered. "We've just been sealed in here to be left to die. An easy method of eliminating us. Isn't that so?"

Curtis was silent, and when he finally answered his voice was husky.

"You're a stout fella, Jo. And discerning."

"I'm not afraid, Allan," Jo whispered. "I'd always kind of hoped that we'd live to be a ripe old age tog—" She suddenly broke off, flushing.

"Together, Jo?" Allan asked. "Is that what you were going to say?"

Jo didn't look at him. She nodded her head quietly.

Allan Curtis found her hand, and covered it with his own.

"Maybe we will, kid," he said huskily. "Maybe we will at that."

Jo didn't answer. But the look in her lovely eyes was answer enough. She moved closer to Curtis, until her auburn head touched his shoulder.

DAWN was rising in the jungle. The faint gray light of it poured through the two tiny apertures in the cell. Curtis rose and moved to the candle in the wall niche, snuffing it out with thumb and forefinger, then came back to take his place beside Jo.

In his corner, Juan dozed, his magnificently handsome head slumped forward on his cable-muscled arms.

Quite suddenly, Jo turned to Curtis.

"Allan," she whispered sharply. Her hand was on his arm, her head tilted to the side.

Curtis frowned.

"What's up?"

"Listen," Jo entreated.

In the silence, Allan Curtis suddenly heard the faintly scraping sounds outside the barred doorway. They were growing more audible with every moment.

"Footsteps," Allan whispered. "Someone's coming!"

The footsteps were definitely louder now.

"Von Wessel, or Captain Barch," Jo hazarded.

Curtis, swiftly on his feet, shook his head.

"Those are a woman's steps," he whispered.

Curtis moved to the small aperture in the wall, peering out. He turned back to face Jo, his expression one of mixed emotions.

"Von Wessel's accomplice, the girl, Maria," he declared. "She's coming here!"

Jo scrambled hastily to her feet, eyes alight with hope and excitement.

"I had no idea she was here," Jo began.

Curtis cut her off.

"Neither did I." He placed his finger to his lips. Then he stepped back to the small aperture. Jo moved up beside him.

"She's frightened, looking wildly around as she walks," Curtis reported. "Cross your fingers, kid. Something is in the air."

Then Curtis stepped back from the wall opening. He stepped to the stone door, placing his ear against it.

"She's experimenting with the mechanism," he whispered excitedly. "She's going to open this!"

Juan opened his eyes, caught the situation at a glance, and rose to stand beside Curtis and Jo at the door. There was the sudden scraping of stone against stone, then the door began to swing outward!

Curtis pulled Joe back to one side with him. Juan stepped swiftly back to the other side. And then gray light streamed into the cave, and Maria von

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Wessel stepped inside.

JUAN grabbed one of her arms, Curtis the other. Juan had a hand across her mouth. She didn't struggle. Her cold-blue eyes flicked from Juan to Curtis, to Jo, trying to convey a message.

At Curtis' command, Juan removed his hand from her mouth.

"I'm here to help you," Maria von Wessel said swiftly, urgently. "Please release me. I am unarmed. I would not have come here this way had I meant harm to you."

For an instant Curtis hesitated, then he released the blonde girl, signaling Juan to do the same.

"All right," Curtis demanded, "what's this all about?"

Maria von Wessel's shapely body was trembling visibly. There was no mistaking the strain she was under. When she spoke, her sensuous red underlip quivered.

"Kurt von Wessel brought me here with him to kill me. He figured it would be much more easily accomplished in the jungle. He was acting on orders from our High Command, which considered my usefulness to the fatherland at an end. Kurt didn't tell me. Three hours ago, unable to sleep, I rose and started from my tent. I overheard Kurt instructing the captain to have one of his soldiers put a bullet through my skull within the next ten hours."

Looking carefully at the girl, Curtis knew instantly that she spoke the truth.

"I went back to my tent," Maria von Wessel continued, her voice strained. "I could not sleep. I racked my brain for means of escape. I realized the futility of any attempt on my own to escape through these horrible jungles. At last I realized that only through you people could I bargain for my life." Maria von Wessel shuddered visibly. "I have freed you," she said. "I beg of you, now, to take me with you in your flight."

Curtis hesitated for but an instant.

"Very well," he said, "the bargain is made. But I can't promise you anything after we reach Lima."

"I am asking only safe guidance through the jungles," Maria von Wessel answered.

"There are no sentries out there?" Curtis demanded, indicating the courtyard that lay some eighty yards from the cave entrance.

Maria shook her head.

"There was no need for posting them," she said. "The entire group still sleeps."

"You know where we can obtain supplies?" Curtis asked. "We'll need guns, food."

Maria nodded, her blonde hair shimmering in the growing dawn.

"Yes. But we will have to be swift. Follow me."

JUAN moved beside Maria, and Curtis walked with Jo as they started cautiously down the slope from the cave that led to the crumbling ruins below them.

Less than a minute later, the four were moving through the crumbling, weed-tangled ruins of the courtyard. Decaying, vine-webbed walls of ancient stone encircled them on all four sides. And against one of these walls, on the far end of the courtyard, there were six or eight tents pitched.

Beyond the walls, and in the outskirts of the ancient city, Curtis knew, were the rest of the German troops. Their tanks, perhaps from twelve to fifteen of them, and armored motorized equipment had also been stationed out there. Against the wall to their left was a tall stone platform, similar to an altar. A series of steps, twenty or thirty, led up to that crumbling edifice.

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They were halfway across the courtyard, when Maria paused.

"One of those tents contains officers' supplies," she whispered. "Food and guns and ammunition you will find in there. We must not all advance at once. They might be roused. Kurt, the captain, and several lieutenants are in those other tents."

Juan turned to Curtis.

"I go, amigo. I move as silent as the cat."

Curtis debated this an instant.

"Guns first, Juan. Then we'll be able to cover any possible awakening on the Hun's part."

Juan nodded, starting off with incredibly swift stealth. They watched him moving noiselessly, running lightly, toward the tent Maria had indicated as containing supplies. Juan moved not the tiniest pebble in his approach. Then they saw him cautiously entering the supply tent. He reappeared moments later, his arms stacked with three revolvers, a submachine gun, and boxes of cartridge rounds. Then he was back at their side, breathing easily, grinning broadly.

Curtis swiftly strapped one of the revolvers to his side, holstering it on a cartridge belt. He gave the other to Jo, while Juan donned the third.

Then Curtis took the submachine gun, and nodding to Juan, said:

"Now for the food we'll need."

JO and Maria remained behind, this time, while Curtis, four steps behind the swiftly moving Juan, backed the giant negro's advance with the protection of the submachine gun.

Curtis took a position some ten yards before the line of tents, holding the tommy gun in sweeping command of the scene. Juan reentered the supply tent. When he emerged, moments later, laden with four small crates.

"Concentrates," Curtis observed, as Juan came up to him. "Splendid. They won't take room, and will provide all the nourishment we'll need."

Curtis took two of the oblong crates under one arm.

"Give the other two to Jo until we reach the outside of these walls safely," he ordered Juan. "I'll remain here and keep the tents covered. Go with the senoritas as far as the wall. See they are covered well, then return."

Juan started off toward Jo and Maria. From the corner of his eye, Curtis saw Juan escorting the two women toward the wall gate. And then Curtis heard the shot ring out, felt the stinging flash of pain in the soft flesh of his shoulder, and saw Kurt von Wessel, smoking automatic in hand, moving from the farthest tent toward him.

And even as Curtis realized he was hit, even as he dropped to one knee and trained the submachine gun on Kurt von Wessel, he realized that this shot had spelled their doom. The camp would come alive, and it would be impossible to escape from the walled courtyard.

Then the tommy gun was rattling in Curtis' arms, spitting flame and death at the figure of Kurt von Wessel.

The Nazi agent had time to fire twice more before the flame from the tommy gun cut him down. Curtis felt the *spat* of stone flicking at his feet, and thanked God that von Wessel's last shots had missed.

Kurt von Wessel was sprawled face forward in the dust. But in seconds later, Curtis knew, the occupants of the other tents would be spewing forth, weapons in hand. He rose, wheeling, to see Juan, already aware of what had happened, dashing with Jo and Maria away from the wall gate and toward the tall stone platform at the other side of the courtyard.

Mentally Curtis thanked God for

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Juan's presence of mind. The massive negro had known, the instant Kurt von Wessel's shots rang out, that it would be suicidal to attempt an exit through the wall gate. He had immediately sized up the situation and decided swiftly that the only vantage point in the courtyard would be that stone platform. There were buttresses along its edge that would be protection.

Curtis set out across the courtyard toward the same objective as Juan, Jo, and Maria dashed for. He'd traveled less than a hundred yards when the first shots sounded behind him.

HE wheeled, then, dropping to his knees, training the tommy gun on figures of German officers emerging from the tent line. His fire caught two of them instantly, and sent the third to cover.

Then Curtis was on his feet again, dashing once more toward the high stone platform against that far wall.

And now two soldiers dashed through the wall gate, rifles in hand. They sighted Juan and the two girls instantly. And even as they raised their rifles to their shoulders, Juan turned, stopped, and whipped out his revolver.

The huge negro dropped to one knee, steadying his aim, and with incredible nerve drew careful bead. He dropped the first of the soldiers with his first shot.

But the second German had fired, now. And Curtis saw Maria sprawl headlong as his rifle barked. She didn't move, even though Jo had stopped and was trying to help her to rise.

Then Juan's second shot dropped the second rifleman before he could fire again. Juan was on his feet then, dashing to where Jo bent over Maria. He paused an instant, then grabbed Jo's arm and hurried her up to the first of the stone platform steps.

Curtis turned again now, sweeping his tommy gun back and forth to cover Jo and Juan's ascent to the platform. He moved backward as rapidly as he could, finally gaining the first steps himself. Then he turned and dashed up the crumbling flagstones.

Jo and Juan had gained the stone platform, and were covering his ascent. And then Curtis was beside them, helping Juan drag a tripod-mounted machine gun from its position overlooking the other side of the wall. They speedily turned the gun about, so that now it covered the courtyard.

"They must have had this posted to cover any outside approach," Curtis grunted thankfully, as they tugged the gun into position. He found a crate with sufficient ammunition rounds, then.

Jo, revolver almost concealing the tiny hand in which she held it, looked grimly beautiful, and deadly determined.

"Maria caught the shot in the back," she said briefly. "It went through her heart."

Curtis was breathing more easily for the moment. They were now in a position that would be costly to attack. The buttressing of the stone boulders on the platform's edge gave them protection enough, with luck. And Juan, behind the machine gun, was a coolly efficient marksman.

"Get into concealment," Curtis ordered Jo. She took a position behind a boulder three times her size.

And then, through the wall gate to their right, more than a dozen German soldiers swarmed.

GRINNING at the opportunity, Juan swung the machine gun muzzle on them. And as Curtis dropped beside him to feed the belt through the gun, Juan opened fire.

The attackers wilted under the

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deadly chatter of the gun, sprawling backward as the bullets scythed through their numbers like a harvester through wheat. Only three lived to flee back through the gate entrance.

"Nice work," Curtis commended.

Juan grinned. He was a first class fighting man in paradise.

"Thank you, amigo," he said.

Moments passed, while outside the wall gate there was the sound of voices raised excitedly. But no one reappeared in the courtyard. The moments crawled into fifteen, then thirty minutes.

"Wonder what they're up to?" Jo asked quietly.

And then, through the wall gate and out into the courtyard toward them, strode the slim, uniformed arrogant figure of the German captain, Brach. He held one hand aloft, with a white handkerchief in it.

"Keep a bead on him, Juan," Curtis ordered. Then he rose into view behind his boulder.

Captain Brach halted some fifty yards away from their position.

"Curtis," he shouted, "do not be a fool. You cannot hold that position more than a few hours, even though it be momentarily advantageous. I guarantee the safety of the girl if you surrender instantly."

Curtis looked grimly to Jo. She grinned.

"I don't believe the liar," Jo said coolly.

"Start running, Brach!" Curtis shouted. "You'll take this position, undoubtedly, but you'll pay the price it'll cost."

"Curtis," Brach snapped, "you are a fool. Consider. The gir—"

"Make him dance," Curtis ordered Juan.

The machine gun chattered briefly. Almost at Brach's feet, bullets kicked up dust. The arrogant little captain retreated in undignified haste.

Juan, grin wide on his ebon features, opened fire again, following the racing little captain from a distance of four feet with bullets. He broke into laughter as Brach scurried through the wall gate.

Curtis smiled grimly.

"They'll be back," he promised. "Plenty soon, and with plenty of trouble."

And then, as if to confirm his words, they heard the sudden *thrumming* of motors snarling to life. Juan looked up, the smile gone from his face.

"That noise, amigo, come from many tanks!"

Curtis picked up the submachine gun he'd discarded when he'd started feeding ammunition to Juan's larger gun. His lips were tight . . .

CHAPTER IX

A Panzer Attack!

JO was suddenly beside Allan, then, her hand lightly on his arm, her eyes answering his own swift glance with equal fearless resolution.

"They're coming this time meaning business," Allan said tautly. "Our argument with a brace of tanks can't be more than a short one, a very short one, Jo."

The sound of the tank motors was steady and menacing, now. It seemed, moments later, as if they were moving into action, approaching the wall gate down the courtyard.

Juan's grin was unflinching.

"Must shoot plenty damn sharp now, eh amigo?" he grunted.

Curtis nodded.

"And sharper still, Juan. Unfortunately we've nothing even looking like an anti-tank gun here on the platform.

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We'll have to make the best of a very bad bargain."

Jo's sharp exclamation of discovery knifed the air, even before Curtis had finished speaking.

"Allan, look!" Jo was pointing to a hitherto unnoticed concealment under one of the boulder buttresses.

Following her pointing finger, Curtis saw a small crate concealed there under the rock. He stepped swiftly over to it, dragging the crate forth.

His own exclamation was one of rekindled hope.

"Good God, luck is still with us." He rose, pointing down at the crate. "Grenades, a dozen of them. The old potato masher style. They aren't the same as anti-tank guns, but they'll be more than what we have!"

"Madre de Dios!" Juan said softly. "It is fate!"

And suddenly the thundering of the tank motors came to them with definitely increased vibration.*

Curtis dragged the crate swiftly behind their boulder buttresses, and picked up his submachine gun once again. Jo returned to her place of safety, at Curtis' urgent signal to do so.

And then the first of the tanks nosed through the wall gate into the courtyard, and rumbling directly behind it in a single file formation followed three more!

"Brach is taking no chances," Curtis said bitterly. "A tank for each of us and one to spare!"

The four tanks were of the light panzer action type, Curtis saw, that had been used so successfully in action against France and in Poland.

Now they continued single file, straight across the courtyard at right angles to the platform, until all four were inside the courtyard.

"Ready!" Curtis said grimly.

An instant later, the tanks all wheeled sharply, swinging directly toward the platform, lined four across, and started bearing toward them.

"Give it sharply, Juan!" Curtis shouted.

JUAN'S gun chattered to life, sweeping a hail of fire against the steel sheaths that covered their approaching enemy. It was impossible to tell if any of his fire was penetrating the chinks and apertures through which the tank guns peered. They kept coming forward.

"They're not wasting fire until they get closer," Curtis declared. "Which is just what I'd hoped for!"

Curtis bent swiftly, brought forth a grenade from the crate. He pulled the pin, counted briefly, and then hurled it out from the platform at the approaching line of tanks.

It exploded squarely between the center pair of tanks, which had been less than five feet apart from one an-

* The presence of Nazi paratroop panzer units, even in South American jungle territory, might be closer to actuality than mere possibility. Certain it is that the Axis powers interested in South American control would stop at nothing to gain that objective. And equally certain, in the terms of practical military feasability, is the fact that plane carriers, operating along the vast coastal sectors of South America, could approach close enough to jungle shores to send troops with equipment over the jungle, dropping them at locations prearranged with fifth columnists.

Scarcely a day passes in Washington military and state department circles, that there are not clouded rumors of actual filtrations in various similarly situated sectors in many of the neutral nations. One military expert recently hinted that Jap divisions were thus landed in some of the Luzon sectors as early as five days before December 7th.

Stories have also come out of the deeper Mexican regions, hinting that entire paratroop units have been discovered lurking in desolate jungle and mountain areas, waiting for striking orders. These rumors, fortunately, have added that alert Mexican scout patrols have swiftly "mopped up" such units, adding to the fantastic status of the modern hidden lightning warfare developed by the European Mad Dog.—Ed.

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other. The tank on the right of the center was knocked up and over on its side, while the one on the left center was blasted completely around by the force of the explosion until it was facing in the opposite direction.

But the tanks on each extreme end were both still coming doggedly down on them now, and suddenly there was a sharp exclamation of elation from Juan.

Curtis wheeled to see the tank on the left end of the line veered wildly off at a sharp right angle. One of Juan's machine gun bursts had penetrated a chink and caught the driver!

And then Curtis had the second grenade in his hand, and Juan had left the machine gun to get a grenade himself. Both pulled pins at the same time, and both hurled their grenades with grim accuracy at the remaining tank that still bore down on them from the right.

Juan's grenade caught the tank flush on the tower, and Allan's hit directly below the stomach of the metal monster. With tremendous force they exploded simultaneously.

And when the haze and smoke and dust had cleared, the tank lay completely over on its back, tractors still moving, like some gigantic beetle!

But the left center tank, the one that had been knocked around in the opposite direction by the explosive force of Allan's first grenade, was now turned about and starting toward them again!

And as Juan leaped back to his gun position, and Curtis tore another grenade from the crate at his feet, the fore gun of that tank blasted forth!

There was a shrill whining as the shell, misdirected, went above their heads and back into the jungle.

JUAN was firing again with the machine gun, trying to work toward another lucky demolition of the approaching monster. But the hail of his bullets ricochetting off the steel belly of the tank told what little effect his fire was having.

Curtis pulled pin again on the grenade he held, just as the second tank gun blazed forth at their position. The second shot was closer, blasting into the wall high above and behind them, showering the platform with a rain of stone and dirt.

Then Curtis hurled again, his grenade exploding directly beneath the belly of the oncoming tank. It went over and back in a geyser of flame and dirt and noise.

The tank Juan had gotten with his lucky through-chink hail of machine gun fire, now having replaced the driver, was limping back away from the courtyard platform, heading toward the wall gate.

Juan rose, leaving his gun position, and stepped to the grenade crate. He was grinning widely.

"I stop that beetle from get away, amigo!" Juan exclaimed, seizing a grenade.

Curtis started to protest that the distance was all of a hundred yards, that the accuracy of such a throw, not to mention the distance, was next to impossible. And then he saw the ripple of ebon shoulder muscle through Juan's magnificent torso, and clamped his jaw shut.

Juan pulled the pin with his white, even, tough teeth.

Then he drew back his massive arm, counting briefly, his huge chest leaning far out over their buttresses of boulders. He grunted, hurling the grenade with every last atom of his superb strength.

And even as the grenade sailed high across the courtyard, straight toward the tank making for the wall gate, the staccato chatter of machine gun fire burst forth from the side of the dis-

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abled tank lying half-over some fifty yards from their platform.

Juan's mouth opened in swift pain as the bullets ripped across his massive chest. Then his white teeth were flashing against his ebon face, belying the pain in his dark eyes. He'd exposed himself as far too vulnerable a target.

Juan slumped down behind the boulder buttresses on the platform, just as his grenade landed beneath the caterpillars of the tank heading for the wall gate. The explosion was violent, definite, as the tank bounced crazily over on its tower and stopped.

Then Curtis was beside him, holding his massive handsome black head in his arms, looking sickly, grimly, at the blood that burbled from Juan's pierced chest.

"It . . . is . . . over . . . for Juan, amigo," the massive negro gasped.

JO WAS hovering solicitously beside Curtis and his fallen comrade. Her lovely face was white, her eyes welled with unshed tears.

Then the thunderous clamor of many tank motors took up anew outside the walled courtyard. And the girl and the white man, and the dying Juan all knew that another tank attack was starting, and that there would be many more than four to face in this fresh onslaught.

"They come in . . . greater . . . numbers, amigo," Juan said weakly.

Curtis said nothing. His own eyes were as misted as Jo's.

"Peru," Juan mumbled. "Not fall . . . under heel . . . conqueror." He coughed, blood reddening his white, strong teeth. "Great God Sacha . . . come aid . . . in hour . . . Peru's need . . . as always . . . before." *

Juan's brown eyes were glazing, staring almost sightlessly up at Curtis and the girl. A reddish foam flecked the corners of his handsome mouth.

"Sacha . . . Great God Snake . . . Great Daughter of Sacha . . . *Paswulg neh . . . como . . . salendar istu zes,*" Juan mumbled thickly.

Jo looked at Curtis.

"What does he say?"

---

* Legend of Sacha, the snake god, and his daughter.

Buried deep in the fragmentary records of ancient Inca legends, is the often referred to story of the once splendid city of Sacha. Ruled by Queen Remura, who professed to be the daughter of an incredibly huge snake—after which the city was named—the ancient Inca metropolis was devastated by Spanish Conquistadors in a sudden and savage raid. Most of the citizenry were supposed to have been slain; all of the city was left in smoking ruin. The snake god Sacha, and his daughter, Queen Remura, however, were supposed to have escaped into the jungle. And it was while the Spaniards were still terrifying the smaller villages outside the city that Queen Remura returned, astride the great snake Sacha, rallying the remaining Incans, and slaying the despoilers to the last man.

C. H. Barrington, in his two volume treatise, *"Ancient Inca, Its Legends and Civilizations"*, said of this particular story around the snake god legend, "True it is that the Spaniards ravaged these particular coastal regions. And also true, is the fact that the crumbling wreck of a Spanish galleon was found shattered on the shores of this region some seventy-five years after the incident is supposed to have transpired. There were no bleached bones of the Spanish crew, as is generally the case, in the waters near the beached and rotting hulk to indicate that Conquistadors had been aboard when it was washed ashore. It's crew, whatever happened to it, undoubtedly perished somewhere in the jungle during a raiding foray. It is not beyond reason to suppose that the crew fell victims of the surviving members of the devastated city of Sacha."

And about the legend itself, Barrington adds, "There is evidence that some primeval monsters, tremendous snakes of the size attributed to Sacha, were in existence in the Peruvian jungles at the time this ancient Inca city was in its glory. And even as late as 1931, rumors have come from the little explored sectors of the jungle to the effect that a giant snake prowled the ruins of the little known city, always accompanied by a strangely beautiful girl."

As to the native attitude toward the legend, Barrington concludes, "Among the more superstitious, it is still the belief that Sacha guards the fate of Peru with his daughter, always ready to thwart another despoiling of the proud nation."—Ed.

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Curtis shook his head, bewilderedly.

"I'm not certain. It's an ancient incantation, Inca origin. Prayer to the daughter of the snake god, Sacha."

The noise of the rumbling tanks was very much louder now, and Curtis looked up sharply. At any instant they would rumble through the wall gate.

And suddenly there was another noise. Thunder rumbled menacingly in the distance, and the sky seemed to take a darker tint. The jungle creatures chattered nervously above all this.

"Sacha," Juan gasped, *"Husmach sensamol . . . inshani yegreda zes."* Again he coughed, weakly.

Against the darkening sky there came the sudden flashing flame of lightning!

And then the thunder broke forth like a million rolling kettle drums furiously crashing cadence one against the other. Huge drops of rain began to splatter down, while the red sky became dusty-amber, then gray-black.

"Sacha!" Juan gasped, *"cresuch zes istu! Klabon . . . urinti . . . mol!"*

Again the lighting flashed across the gray black sky. The jungle creatures were silent now, and there was no sound against the growing storm save the rumbling snarl of the tank motors approaching the wall gate entrance to the courtyard.

Juan's eyes suddenly lidded, his head rolled limply. Curtis looked up at Jo.

Juan gasped one more sentence before his huge body went completely limp in Curtis' arms.

"Sacha, wunphy zes constuiduo!"

Curtis lowered him to the platform.

"He's dead," he told Jo.

AND then the thunder and the lightning crackled and spat above them in the darkened heavens, while through the wall gate crawled the first ominous line of tanks!

The rain was increasing from scattered huge drops to a growing tattoo that rose in intensity with every passing instant. Curtis lifted Juan's body swiftly, but gently, in his arms, moving it back against the wall at the rear of the platform.

And as he dashed back to Jo's side the rain was suddenly a drenching, driving deluge of jungle fury, while the sky opened in flashing flame and thundered wildly.

And the tanks, fifteen of them, were in the courtyard, while others still crawled in!

The courtyard was rapidly becoming a vast sea of mud and water as the torrent continued to pour down from the maddened skies. The first of the tanks wheeled to open fire with its fore gun on the platform.

The sound of the gun was lost in the thunder above them, but its flame spat through the darkness of the storm, and its effect was told in the terrible crashing devastation it wrought on the huge wall directly behind their position on the platform.

Curtis threw his arm about Jo's waist, hurling her to the side as the shell smashed into the wall behind them. And then the tanks were driving through the sea of mud in the courtyard, rushing straight at the platform.

Curtis glanced at the crate of grenades and realized the utter futility of such an effort at resistance. Their only chance now lay in a desperate dash through the rain and mud and darkness.

It was at that moment, when Curtis debated swiftly their next action, that Jo, half turned to glance at the devastation wrought on the platform wall, screamed shrilly, horribly.

Curtis turned, glancing swiftly at the gaping rent in the wall, and then his jaw fell slack, while horror filled his eyes.

An incredibly huge snake, a coiling,

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undulating monster at least five feet thick and forty yards long, was writhing from the gaping rent in the platform wall!

And it was Curtis who first saw the girl atop the creature's back, the girl who rode the giant reptile and brandished a lance in one hand as her body swayed just behind its dipping, weaving head. It was Curtis who was first to see the girl, and scream in hoarse horror.

"Good God!"

And then he was shielding Jo with his body, backing hard against the far end of the platform wall while the giant reptile and its weird human rider slithered forth from the gap in the wall.

"Sacha!" Curtis murmured in horrified conviction. "Sacha the Snake God, and the daughter of Sacha!"

"Allan, Allan," Jo was whispering in terror, "Juan was calling, summoning, that . . . that monster and its mistress!"

Allan Curtis gripped the girl's arm tightly. White-faced, he nodded . . .

CHAPTER X

Sacha

THE scene was like something from the black depths of a horrible nightmare. The roaring growl of the thunder had intensified, and the jagged forks of lightning slashed the boiling heavens with eye-searing brilliance as the immense reptile slithered through the shattered wall.

Stone crunched to powder under the mighty body of the monstrous beast as it slid ponderously over the smashed debris.

As the great snake's angrily weaving head flowed through the demolished aperture, Curtis crouched against their barricade, protecting Jo with his body.

Logical thought or reasoning was impossible.

This monstrous apparition was impossible, beyond the wildest flights of imagination, but still it existed before his eyes.

Through the pelting rain he could see the figure of the girl astride the snake's back. Her head was thrown back exultantly and her rain-darkened hair streamed gloriously behind her, like a triumphant banner.

He had only one brief glimpse of her savagely flashing eyes, her sharply chiseled features, before she was carried from his range of vision as the mighty reptile slithered massively down the broken steps leading to the courtyard.

The incredibly huge body of the snake flowed past them, writhing with mighty undulations that shook the very foundations of the stout stone barricade.

Curtis scrambled to the side of the barricade where they had placed their machine gun and peered into the courtyard—where the front line of German tanks was advancing inexorably.

Even through the torrential rain he could see the oncoming tanks, squat, invincible harbingers of destruction. There were eight of them proceeding in formation toward the barricade.

The mighty head of the snake was weaving and swooping thirty feet in the air, and its vast coiling length was slithering toward the foremost tank.

Curtis felt his heart hammering sickeningly in his body. His hands clenched until he could feel them numbing.

This incredible scene was like a page torn from a madman's view of Dante's inferno. Its unbelievable import was physically staggering.

THE thunder broke over the courtyard like the crashing of giant sledges, and in the wild illumination

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furnished by the blazing lightning, Curtis saw the massively coiling body of the snake loop slowly but inevitably about the nearest tank.

The advance of the tank was instantly halted.

The coils of the snake lashed another loop about the halted tank and lifted it clear of the ground.

The forward guns of the tank swung helplessly back and forth like the feelers of a giant bug. A futile burst spat from the muzzles of the gun, but the tank was inexorably lifted—five—ten—a dozen feet from the soggy, muddy ground.

Then the thick coils tightened with the irresistible power of a mighty vise. Dozens of feet above the suspended tank, the daughter of the snake god flung her head back and screamed a strange, chilling command into the teeth of the maddened storm.

Curtis heard a rending, cracking sound, that carried to him, even above the banshee-howl of the wind. Through the drenching murky rain he saw the sides of the tank crumple under the tremendous pressure of the great snake's coiled body. The steel armor of the tank cracked inexorably, and as the mighty coils continued to tighten, the tank crumpled into a twisted, shattered mass of wreckage.

A horrible, nerve-chilling cry came from the twisted, crushed tank as the coils of the snake tightened with one final undulation.

Curtis felt a shudder pass through him.

From the tangled wreckage of the tank a human figure fell to the ground. Or rather something that had been a human figure. The mangled, broken thing that lay beneath the suspended tank had only the faintest resemblance to a human body.

The crushed wreckage of the tank was raised high now by the fantastically immense snake, and at a signal from the imperious girl, the coiled body of the snake whipped the tangled wreckage to the ground with a shuddering crash.

The crushed tank lay on its side, a broken, useless thing. The snake slithered away from it and moved with sinuous speed toward the other tanks.

THREE of the oncoming tanks had halted and wheeled about to face the monstrous snake. It was obvious that they had witnessed the destruction of the first tank.

A rattling burst of fire broke from the tower guns of the three tanks, and Curtis saw that concerted fire pour into the flank of the mighty snake.

Its head was weaving high in the air, keeping the girl out of the range of fire, but its own immense body was completely unprotected before the murderous blast from the three tanks.

Still the immense creature moved forward. There was no hesitation in its deliberate advance. Instead the fire of the three tanks seemed to infuriate it to a pitch of savage, devastating rage.

With lashing speed its tail looped about the first of the tanks, jerking it into the air. With a sweeping movement it swung the tank in a wide arc and dashed it into the side of the second with incredible force.

The massive steel-armored vehicle shattered completely the tank it struck, knocking it onto its side. The tower door of the tank opened and three men spilled out. In the murky darkness it was impossible to see their faces, but the congealing horror that gripped them was evident from their frozen helplessness before the spectacle that met their eyes.

They did not attempt to run. One of them sank to his knees, his hands

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clasped over his eyes, but the other stood in motionless terror as the mighty head of the snake passed over them, high in the air.

The tail of the snake, as thick as a tree trunk, whipped about the three men. Their arms and legs threshed with frantic futility as they were lifted into the air. The coils of the snake tightened once—swiftly and inevitably—and the arms and legs of the German tank crew ceased to move.

Curtis felt Jo trembling against him. Her face was frozen in rigid horror. With a low moan she buried her face against his chest.

Curtis held her tightly with one arm, and with the other he swung the machine gun about to cover the courtyard.

THE remaining tanks were wheeling about and lumbering desperately for the court entrance. The mighty length of the snake coiled swiftly and slithered after them. High in the air, the slim figure of the daughter of the snake god was vaguely visible through the downpour. Lance held high she screamed into the gale, her glorious hair streaming wildly behind her. She was, at once, the most thrilling, the most savage sight Curtis had ever witnessed.

As the tanks escaped through the court entrance, Curtis saw a small contingent of Germans pour into sight from a wall gate on the opposite side of the enclosure.

Curtis saw that the three leading German soldiers were dragging a heavy, anti-tank gun between them. In one of the flashes of lightning he saw that they were hastily setting it for action, with its heavy blunt muzzle directed at the vulnerable flank of the huge snake.

Swiftly, Curtis swung the machine gun around to cover the small band of Germans. With savage speed he jammed both firing buttons down, sprayed a lethal burst at the German contingent.

His first blast was off, but as he swung the gun into more accurate position, three of the Germans staggered and fell to the muddy ground.

The others flung themselves prone as they located the direction of Curtis' fire.

Curtis fired desperately at their position, but he couldn't tell if his raking fire was hitting its objective.

A belching burst from the anti-tank gun suddenly sounded, and Curtis saw a flash of flame spear through the muggy darkness.

In spite of his fire the Germans had managed to get their anti-tank gun into action.

Peering through the downpour Curtis saw the immense shadowy shape of the snake veering and slithering toward the German gun crew.

Another blast from the anti-tank gun sounded, and the shrill staccato of machine gun fire was added to the melee, but the mighty snake continued its inexorable advance.

Within fifty feet of the gun crew the thick bludgeoning tail of the snake lashed out with terrific speed. Sweeping over the muddy ground with tremendous force it smashed into the Germans, slamming them to the ground like toy soldiers before the sweep of a mighty fist.

The anti-tank gun was hurled fifty feet through the air. It crashed against the wall of the enclosure, a twisted mass of useless wreckage.

THE immense head of the snake reared in the air and Curtis saw that the slim body of the girl was lying limply across the reptile's broad back.

The lance had fallen from her hand and was lying on the ground. Curtis saw then, even through the blinding gusts of rain, the blood that trickled

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from the girl's body and painted a red smear against the side of the monstrous snake.

The body of the snake slowly uncoiled. The roaring fury of the storm crescendoed to a wild pitch, and in the keening maelstrom of the tempest there was a sobbing mournful note that sent a chill through Curtis.

Through the blinding storm Curtis could see the mighty head of the snake lowering slowly to the ground. The limp figure of the daughter of the snake god was dead, and some psychic awareness of this seemed to be transmuted to the mighty snake and to the endless darkness and mystery of the Peruvian jungle.

Then Curtis saw the mighty length of the snake coiling again and moving with deliberate purpose toward the courtyard entrance through which the German tanks had disappeared. . . .

CURTIS held Jo closely in his arms. "We've got a chance again," he said tensely. "With luck we can make the coast. My work here is done. Rather it was done for me by—"

"Sacha," Jo murmured. "Oh, Allan, I feel as if I'm about to lose my mind. Have I dreamed all of this unimaginable horror?"

"I don't think so," Allan said softly. "There are things in the depths of this country which few white people would believe, even if they saw. I think we've seen one of those things. At any rate the menace to the unity of South America is over, forever, I believe."

Jo drew a short shuddering breath. "Is there any chance for us to get out of here? Tell me the truth, Allan. I won't mind if we can't. We'll be going together, at least."

Curtis looked carefully around the ravages of the storm, then he looked down at Jo and, for the first time in many hours, he grinned.

"I don't think we'll get out," he said, "I *know* it."

HEMISPHERIC SOLIDARITY WINS! SOUTH AMERICAN NATIONS VOTE CRUSHING REBUFF TO THE AXIS

(S.P.P.) With the final ironing out of the Peruvian-Ecuadorian border disputes, the Pan American Conference at Rio de Janeiro lined up solidly to form an anti-axis bloc which will undoubtedly be reviewed in history as one of the greatest Allied victories of the century.

DISH OUT THE DIRT

By A. MORRIS

ARE you a geophagist? A what you ask! Well a geophagist is what is known as an earth-eater in just "plain" English. Although you may scoff at the idea of a person in his right mind eating earth, it is found to exist everywhere from the most primitive of tribes to the most civilized nations including our own.

Earth-eating is not influenced by race, creed, religion, or custom, being one of the most individual of all human habits. In one tribe, you will find persons who eat earth and others, even members of the same family, who frown upon the practice.

When one considers that all peoples eat salt, pepper, and cocoa leaves, and chew gum and tobacco, the eating of earth is not so strange. In fact some fine-grained, rich clays contain iron and are often used as medicine.

Of course, every type of earth is not used as a food and whether a certain type is eaten depends upon its flavor, odor, color, and digestibility.

The relative indigestibility of earth and clay prevents their becoming a regular item of a person's daily diet and all peoples prefer other foodstuffs. However, many people have turned to earth as a substitute for other foods during periods of severe famine since it contains qualities that produce that "full" feeling in your stomach.

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SUDDEN DEATH FROM SOUND

Here is the terrible weapon that the science of sound may soon develop

By KEN KOBER

THE laboratory light bathed the two white-coated scientists in the yellowness of incandescant light as they tensely leaned over what appeared to be a huge wash tub. One of the men, a serious looking, thin-faced man, slowly lowered his finger into the bottom of the tub, toward what looked like a seething mass of plain everyday engine oil which was rippling as if under constant vibration. Slowly his finger dipped toward a cone shaped bump in the center of the tub—a bump like the one you see just after you've tossed a stone into the water—just for an instant his finger touched the vibrating cone of oil, and with the swiftness of a panther he withdrew his hand with a shrill cry of pain.

"Look, I've been burned—burned by sound!"

Next the scientists placed a glass test tube into the deadly tub and it was shattered into a hundred pieces. A live fish was placed in water in the bottom of the tank and it was killed instantly, a frog was first paralyzed and then killed; yet the water—used in place of oil here—still remained cool. Later an examination revealed that the fish and frog had literally been torn apart by the vibrations in the tank—vibrations caused by supersonic sound.

The two men working on this experiment were the distinguished American Physicist, Professor R. W. Wood, of Johns Hopkins University and Mr. Alfred Loomis, an amateur scientist of New York City. Professor Wood, with Mr. Loomis' help, had carried on the experiments which had been started by a Professor Pierre Langevin, of Paris. Professor Wood was in Europe at the time of Professor Langevin's experiments during the First World War and he noted their potentialities.

Professor Langevin was asked by the French Government to try to devise some way of signaling between ships at sea so that no enemy could possibly intercept the message. Professor Langevin, remembering an observation made years before by the two Curie brothers—one of them later became the husband of Madame Curie of radium fame—hit upon the idea of using sound inaudible to the human ear as a means of communication. The Curies had found that a crystal of quartz, pure rock crystal, when exposed to electric current, will change a little in length or thickness.

By making the electric current vibrate back and forth very rapidly, as the current does in your telephone when you talk over it, it was discovered the quartz crystal would also vibrate back and forth, making it sing as though it was a musical instrument. Although the changes in size of the quartz crystal were so small as to be invisible to the naked eye, nonetheless the effect was the same as that of a vibrating harp string.

The two Curies also noticed that these vibrations could be increased indefinitely in pitch in such a way as to produce shriller and shriller notes, producing an effect similar to that of an organ with very small pipes made of hard echoey iron. As the iron pipes would get smaller and smaller, the sound pitch would go higher and higher. Finally, the Curies observed that the quartz crystal no longer gave off any sounds, yet they were able to find evidence that the crystal continued to vibrate. Tests revealed that sound was being produced, only this sound was inaudible to the human ear; the sounds were the first artificially reproduced "ultra sounds."

PROFESSOR LANGEVIN seized upon the Curies' experiments as an ideal means of signaling at sea with inaudible sound. No one could hear the sound, but electrical instruments, tuned to the proper

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frequency, can detect the vibrations just as electrically vibrated quartz crystals can produce them. The device was tried and it worked. From one French warship to another sped messages that no human ear could hear. It is probable that fish "felt" the messages, because numerous fisherman in the territory reported poor fishing during the time the messages were sent. Chances are the fish were somewhat "stunned" by the vibrations but later recovered.

Thus it was that supersonic death vibrations were first developed by Mr. Loomis and Professor Wood. Since that time supersonic vibrations have been used to operate aircraft altimeters by sending vibrations to the earth and back and automatically measuring the time it takes for the sound to travel this distance. Such altimeters are said to be accurate to the amazing short distance of one foot. In a like manner a marine sounding device determines ocean depths. The latest wrinkle is the use of sound in determining the presence of enemy aircraft. Supersonic sound is broadcast from the pursuing craft and when it hits an object in the air, it immediately bounces back. The time it takes to hit and bounce back and the direction of the aerial, gives a basis from which to compute the location of the enemy aircraft. This is one theory expressed by experts on the subject.

Taking on where Professor Wood and Mr. Loomis left off, Professor E. Newton Harvey, biologist at Princeton University, and Professor William Richards, of the department of Chemistry at the same institution, have carried on further investigations of the fantastic properties of these super-sound waves.

These two Princeton scientists have discovered that few weapons in the realm of science have the destructive powers or war weapon potentialities that super-sound has. They found that super-sound will actually shake apart the structure of living matter. The essence of blood, red corpuscles, is so shaken by the deadly vibrations that the vital coloring matter is let loose into the liquid part of the blood stream. Living germs are literally bombarded into jelly under the terrific pounding of these super waves. As yet no one has dared to allow these waves come near the human head; and the prospect of any one submitting to the test is mighty unlikely to say the least. It is probable that a few seconds exposure to these waves would so macerate the human brain that it would either mean instant death or idiocy.

There is, however, a very definite field for super-sound in the shaking and destruction of microbes. Microbes, in almost all cases, are too small to be prodded or pushed around by any mechanical means such as a knife or crusher. You can swat a fly, but the very thought of swatting a microbe seems ridiculous. About the only way of killing microbes, up until recently, has been to use some sort of chemical germicide, the molecules of which can get into the tiny cracks and crannies where microbes hide.

BUT mere cracks and crannies will not stop super-sound. It pours into these spots like water into a rotten ship. The super waves are so fast and so tiny that they actually shake the microbes, like a puppy rips and snorts at an old shoe. After a few seconds of this violent agitation, many kinds of microbes get tired and die. Some are shaken apart just as if they had been crushed between tiny millstones.

The microbe-killing properties have already been put to practical use in the destruction of dangerous germs in milk. According to law, in most communities, milk sold to the public must have not more than a certain germ count. Inasmuch as milk from the dairy farm before treatment usually has too high a germ count, some way must be used to kill the surplus germs. This is where super-sound does its job. The milk is passed through a tube arrangement inside of which super-sound is raging. The sound agitates the milk so violently that a large number of the dangerous microbes are shaken apart and killed. There is no effect on the taste of the milk or on its health value.

Sound scientists have also discovered that by varying the pitch of supersonic sound, they can kill one kind of germ and leave other germs alive. The big value of this operation is in the fact that sometimes microbes are used in the manufacture of certain chemicals. Kill these "good" microbes and you can't manufacture the chemicals. Take, for example, the fermentation process in which yeast cells turn sugar into alcohol. Kill the yeast cell and you get no alcohol.

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SUPER-SOUND is also finding use in controlling colloids, such as the thick emulsions of oil and water sometimes used in medicine. These colloidal emulsions consist of myriads of tiny drops of oil distributed throughout a quantity of water. In other cases, the separate, distributed droplets are watery and the medium in which they ride is oily. Salad dressing, as an example, can be made either of these ways.

Until super-sound came along the only know methods of producing colloids was to grind or beat the materials together, splitting both the mixed substances into innumerable tiny drops that seemed to make a perfect mixture. But the super-sound scientist now uses supersonic sound to do the mixing. These powerful waves produce a minute but effective mechanical action that makes both liquids become suspended within each other.

It is known that German scientists have seized upon this development to produce a smoother and better photographic film. By treating the photographic emulsion with super-sound, the Germans have been able to produce a film with less grain for use in minicameras that take pictures for future enlargement.

In the battle against smoke over our cities, super-sound has been playing an important part, too. Although smoke looks for all the world like a gas, it is really nothing more than a huge mass of small solid particles of soot or ash floating in the air. Tests have shown as many as a million of these tiny particles in one cubic foot. If nothing happened to these particles, a cloud of smoke would last forever and our cities would soon become untenable. But nature takes care of this by having individual smoke particles join up with each other to make twins, or triplets, or larger groups. Scientists call this process flocculation, and it's responsible for the fact that city smoke eventually disappears.

By putting super-sound to work scientists have been able to hasten this flocculation. Government engineers have recognized the value of super-sound's smoke-killing properties and have suggested that smoke-belching plants and powerhouses be equipped with supersonic smoke killers. Such a device would send supersonic sound up and down the chimney, either in audible or inaudible waves. This would make the smoke particles gather into clumps and settle before reaching the outside air.

Although such a system has yet to be tried on a large scale and does not appear practicable on a small scale, it does have gigantic possibilities in saving valuable particles which might otherwise be lost in the form of smoke. Both gold and silver in the smoke of smelting plants can be salvaged in this manner.

BUT most amazing of all is the use of super-sound, really plain everyday noise you can't hear, to speed up the aging of whisky. Chemists explain the aging process as one of slow oxidation along with the mixing of chemicals which come from the barrels in which the liquor is aged.

Ordinarily, these reactions take months or years for their full effect on the flavor of the liquor. But super-sound does the job in a few minutes.

For years scientists have been trying to control insects, to fight the locust and the chinch bug and save our crops from these destructive creatures. So far their success has only been partial, but there is new hope in the field of sound waves. There are two possibilities here: one, lure the insects into traps and kill them; two, simply kill them once they have been collected.

What does the future hold for sound waves? Will it some day become a destructive weapon of war that will literally shake airplanes—even whole cities into whole and utter destruction? Yes, these are the true possibilities of sound. Already bomb shock, horribly tearing childish brains into a form of dazed insensibility, are mute evidence of the power of sound in this war. You can easily understand the sudden death possibilities of sound, if man ever learns to control super-sound in such a way as to concentrate its power after "shooting" it at the enemy. And, as one scientist gravely states, "Let us hope such a day never comes."

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SECRET OF THE

by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

Lolita raised her rifle and fired quickly but accurately

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GOLDEN JAGUAR

Was it really there, deep in the jungle; the vast treasure of the Emperor Montezuma?

"BUT *Senor* Craig," Lolita Montez vehemently insisted. "I must have your help. *Must* have it!"

There were four people in the hotel room, and only two chairs. Craig sat on one chair, the girl on the other. The Indian who had accompanied her stood a little behind her, his dark face impassive and inscrutable. Bat Randall was sitting on the edge of the bed. Randall was a mechanic, and Craig's inseparable shadow.

"No," said Craig. Slowly he shook his head. "Sorry, and all that. But what you ask is impossible."

Surprise showed on the girl's face. "You mean you will not help me?" she faltered.

"I mean I cannot help you," Craig corrected.

"Why?" the girl demanded. "You own the big airplane, do you not? In it we can fly most easily to where I want to go. So why can't you help me?"

Craig was a big man, tall and well built. At the girl's question, a grimace crossed his face. He twisted uncomfortably in his rickety chair. At the movement, a paper crackled in his coat pocket, reminding him of the reason why he could not help this girl.

The paper in his pocket was a cablegram. It said, "LAST TWO PAY-

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MENTS OVERDUE. UNLESS PAYMENTS FORTHCOMING IMMEDITEIL WE WILL BE FORCED TO REPOSSESS PLANE."

Craig had put every dollar he owned into the big amphibian moored at the docks of Callao, Peru, not two blocks away from the dingy hotel room where he was sitting. Every dollar and a lot besides, arguing a wary finance company into financing the balance for him. He had planned to use the ship, not as a deluxe passenger liner, but to fly freight from the coast of South America to the almost inaccessible inland cities.* And freight rates being what they were, Craig had been cleaning up.

"Sorry, Miss Montez," the flier said. "Randall and I are packing our bags. Tomorrow we will fly the plane north, turn her over to the finance company. I would like to do as you ask, but it is financially impossible."

"But you will be paid for your trip, *Senor* Craig." I will gladly pay your regular rates."

"I'm afraid it is too late for a trip at regular rates to interest me, Miss Montez. May I ask why you are so desperate for me to make this trip?"

A shadow of fear crossed her face, was gone as quickly as it came. "My brother," she rapidly explained. "He went on an exploring trip and he has not returned. It is to rescue him that I came to you, *Senor* Craig. You are the only one who has a plane and it is only by plane that we can reach the place where he went. No, do not shake your head. Your big plane will alight on either land or water, will it not? Ah, I thought so. It is what you call an amphibian. The place where my brother went is beside a lake which will provide a perfect landing place for your plane. See I have thought of everything. Now *Senor* Craig will you not make this trip for me?"

CRAIG twisted uncomfortably in his chair. It was not easy to refuse an errand of mercy. But—it was not easy to accept, either. In spite of the girl's claim that a lake provided a perfect landing place, he knew that he was risking his plane. If he lost the plane, he would be left many thousands of dollars in debt. Slowly he shook his head. He would like to help this girl but he was caught in the grip of forces more powerful than he was.

"You—you will not help me?" she faltered.

"I mean I cannot help you," Craig corrected. "With all the good will in the world, there is nothing I can do. It is financially impossible. I am sorry, Miss Montez, but I am scarcely my own master in this matter."

"But my brother, he needs help." She hesitated, sought for words, flicked an imploring glance up at the Indian who stood beside and a little behind her. She had said his name was Pedro. In this country most girls had an Indian servant. Pedro said nothing but the girl seemed to read some meaning in his impassive face. She turned back to the flier and breathlessly spoke.

"*Senor* Craig, if you will find my

* Mining machinery, refrigerators, sewing machines, the thousand and one machine products produced in such profusion by the vast industries of the United States, are little less valuable than gold in that vast hinterland that lies back from the west coast of South America. Because of the difficulties of transportation, this area is not easily reached. There are a few railroads and the other roads are little better than mountain trails. Under such conditions, the airplane is the best and almost the only method of transportation, and commercial air lines in this region have proved bonanzas for their owners. The war, of course, has stopped all this. Merchandise is not being produced for this trade, and if it were being produced, the ships are not available to carry it to the west coast ports. Thus Craig, and other fliers in this region, after spending years developing a profitable business, are finding their hard work has gone for nothing.—Ed.

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brother, and if he has found what he sought, *your reward will be all the gold you can carry away in your big airplane!*"

"What's that?" Craig gasped. "Do you know what you're saying?"

Before the girl could answer the Indian leaned forward and hissed a single syllable in her ear. He spoke in Quicha, the native language, and Craig did not understand him. The girl did. She bit her lips and turned an imploring glance toward him. The Indian shook his head. The girl turned quickly to the flier.

"I spoke without thinking," she said.

"What did the Indian say?" Craig asked.

"He said I should not tell you—he said nothing," she quickly corrected herself. Fright was showing on her face, more than fright, stark naked fear.

"What the devil is this all about?" Craig demanded. "One minute you say you will give me enough gold to load my ship, if I will make one trip for you. The next instant you say you spoke without thinking. What kind of a run-around are you giving me?"

"I can't make such an offer," the girl whispered. "I was frantic. I didn't notice what I was saying." Her eyes went to the Indian in an imploring glance, which made Craig wonder about the relationship between them. Obviously Pedro was her servant, but the flier knew that not infrequently the mistress-servant relationship in this country went far beyond the normal tie between employer and employee, the servant becoming advisor and confidant of his employer. Often the servant was a loyal and trusted friend. Apparently this was the relationship existing here. And the loyal and trusted friend was being defied. A swift conversation in the native language took place. Pedro kept shaking his head.

"I'm going to tell him the truth," Lolita Montez blazed in English. "Do you understand, I've got to tell him."

Pedro relapsed into sullen silence.

THE girl turned to Craig. "I am not giving you what you call the run-around, *Senor* Craig. Please believe me. If you will aid me in finding my brother, and if he has found what he sought, I *will* give you more gold than you have ever seen. Sir, when my brother went on this exploring trip, he was seeking the lost treasure of the Incas, the tremendous loot that Pizarro sought and did not find when he conquered this country. You will earn enough in this one trip to pay all your obligations. Now, *Senor* Craig, will you go?"

Craig came to his feet, his eyes blazing. "The treasure of the Incas!" he gasped. "Do you know what you are talking about?"

The girl faced him. "Yes," she said stubbornly.

"Prove it," the flier snapped.

"You—you will not take my word?"

"I'm not doubting your word but I'm not going off on any wild goose chase, either. I've hear the stories in this country of lost and hidden treasure, the legends of fabulous fortunes waiting to be found. Most of these stories are so much hot air and I'm not interested in listening to any cock and bull yarn. If you can do what you claim, prove it by showing me the evidence you have."

"Very well," the girl snapped, glaring at him. "I will prove it. Pedro." She spoke rapidly in Quicha and the Indian resentfully handed her the small bag he was carrying. She opened it and took out a roll of what looked like heavy paper.

"There, *Senor* Craig, if you must have evidence, look at that."

It was a map. A series of lines indicated a trail leading from the coast

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far inland. Landmarks were given and directions were written in archaic and almost illegible Spanish. The trail ended at a lake far away in the mountains. The material of the map held Craig's eyes. It was not paper. It was the skin of an animal, probably a deer. And it was yellow with age.

It was old, old, how old he could not guess. The skin was frayed, the leather cracked and pitted. Craig ran his fingers over it.

"How did you come into possession of this map, Miss Montez?" he asked.

"It was made by my great-great-great-grandfather. The first Montez," she said proudly, "came to Peru with Pizarro. It was he who visited the place where the gold is hidden and it was he who made this map."

"Very interesting," the flier said. "And if your esteemed forbear knew where this gold was hidden, why didn't he get it?"

"Because he could not," the girl said. "It was most dangerous. The place where it was hidden was well guarded. He was most fortunate to escape alive —*Senor* Craig, you do not believe me!" There was anger in her voice.

"FRANKLY, no," Craig said.

"You think the map is a fake, no?"

"Not necessarily. The map looks genuine enough. But it doesn't prove anything. Sorry, Miss Montez, but you have to do better than this."

"Sir, you are insulting."

"I don't mean to be," Craig said. "But this map is meaningless. Anybody could have made it. And even if it is genuine, it isn't enough for me to risk my plane."

"You want more evidence, no?"

"If you have it, yes," Craig answered.

"Very well. I do have it. Pedro. The bag." She gestured at the Indian to hand her the small bag from which she had taken the map. As soon as the map had been removed, Pedro had taken the bag again.

Pedro refused to give it to her. "No!" he grunted, shaking his head.

"Pedro!" The ringing tones of command were in her voice. "Do you understand me? Give me that bag."

"Nagarsh," the Indian said. "Taboo. Gold bad." He thrust the bag behind him and stood defiantly facing his mistress.

She got out of the chair so fast Craig scarcely saw her move. *Smack!* She slapped the Indian. A white spot appeared on his cheek where her small hand had hit.

"Give me that bag!"

Sullenly, reluctantly, Pedro handed it to her. He didn't want to do it. Something about that bag scared him right down to the floppy sandals he was wearing. But this girl was his mistress and he could only defy her so far. He gave her what she wanted.

She removed from it a small object wrapped in tissue paper. Stripping off the tissue paper, she set the object on the table. Craig leaned over to examine it.

It was a tiny statuette, about three inches high, a model of a crouching beast that resembled a jaguar. It was perfectly carved, even to the tiny, blood-red stones that were its eyes. Every muscle stood out, from the forepaws, drawn up ready for the spring, to the hind legs, which were tensed ready to hurl the beast forward. So excellent was the workmanship that Craig had the impression he was actually looking at a tiny but unquestionably real jaguar.

"There!" said Lolita Montez. "That came from the place where the gold is hidden. It is made of gold. Is that enough evidence for you, *Senor* Craig?"

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THE flier picked it up. Instantly a galvanizing shock passed up his arm. He dropped it.

"The thing is charged," he gasped.

"Charged?" Lolita Montez asked. "I do not understand."

"It is charged with electricity," Craig explained. He brushed his fingers over it, bracing himself against the surge of current. No surge came.

"What the devil is this?" he said bewilderedly. When he had first picked up the statuette a shock similar to the shock from the spark plug of a motor had passed up his arm. The second time the shock did not come. He lifted it, examined it. One thing was immediately obvious: the statuette was made of solid gold. There was no mistaking the dull yellow color.

"Is that enough evidence to make your trip worthwhile?" Lolita asked.

"Well—" Craig said thoughtfully, "I—*What are you doing?*"

He spoke to Bat Randall. The mechanic had risen from his seat on the edge of the bed and was tip-toeing across the room. Randall was short and squat and built on the general lines of a gorilla. With curious eyes on him, he laid a finger on his lips, leaped across the room, and jerked open the door.

Two men fell into the room.

"Ah," said Randall, in a satisfied tone of voice. "Visitors."

The mechanic had two loves. One was a motor, the other was a fight, any kind of a fight. He grinned and cocked a ham-like left fist.

Craig saw Randall strike at one of the two men. The fellow dodged and the blow glanced off. The mechanic drew back to let go again. Craig saw the other man run around the mechanic to strike him from the rear.

"Look out, Bat."

Crack!

A blackjack came down across Randall's head. As if he had suddenly come unjointed, the mechanic slumped to the floor.

Craig dropped the statuette on the table and leaped across the room. Under his breath he was cursing Randall for not telling him there was someone at the door. He smashed his fist home on the face of the man who had struck the mechanic, felt a throb of satisfaction as the man grunted with pain. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw that Pedro had snatched the girl against the wall and was crouched before her. From somewhere in his clothing the Indian had drawn a knife with a blade that looked at least a foot long.

THE glance that he took to make certain the girl was safe was fatal. The man that Randall had hit leaped at him, swinging a lead-filled leather pouch. Craig saw it coming. Only an upflung arm kept him from being knocked instantly unconscious. With stunning force the pouch came down across his head. He staggered backward, stars exploding before his eyes, stumbled into the wall, and fell heavily.

Click!

The lights went out.

Craig, trying to get to his feet, heard the girl scream. One of the attackers shrilled something in a language he did not understand. The flier struggled to his feet. The room was in total darkness. Somebody shoved him and he fell again, this time in front of the door. He had the fleeting impression that a herd of elephants was running over him. Feet clattered in the hall outside. Vaguely he realized what was happening. The two men were escaping. They were running away. He heard one of them scream something at the other. The scream was followed

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by a rattling thud. One pair of feet continued running down the hall.

Craig pulled himself to his feet, fumbled for the light switch, turned it on. The room was a mess. The girl had a chair in her hands. She was backed against the wall with the chair raised ready to strike. Pedro, his knife held low ready for the murderous upward thrust of the experienced knife fighter, was crouched beside her. Bat Randall was sitting on the floor, a surprised expression on his face.

"What — what happened, boss?" Randall said weakly. "What—what were they after?"

"Nothing, so far as I can see," Craig answered. "Anyhow they didn't get anything."

He looked first at the table, to see if the map was there. If the girl's story was correct, that map was very important. The map was still on the table.

A second later Craig realized that even if the map was still there, something else had been taken.

The golden jaguar was gone!

CHAPTER II

A Thief Dies

"WHAT is the meaning of thees?" an angry voice demanded from the doorway. "I cannot have such villainies here. Thees is a most respectable hotel, most respectable indeed."

It was the manager of the hotel. He was almost out of breath and apparently determined to let that interfere with what he had to say. He glared at Craig. "*Senor,* this is most bad. I cannot have fighting in my most respectable hostelry. And," he finished, puffing, "there is a dead man in the hall. What do you have to say to that, *Senor?*"

"A dead man?" Craig echoed. "What killed him? You must be mistaken."

"He is most certainly dead," the manager said. "I do not know how he died, but he is most certainly dead. You can go see for your own self."

"I'll do that," Craig said. He was still a little dazed from the blow he had taken.

The man was lying in the hall, dead. It was one of the two who had burst into the hotel room. A look of agony was stamped on his swarthy face.

"You can see he is dead," the manager said plaintively.

"Yes," said Craig. "I can see that all right. The question is — " He didn't finish what he had started to say.

Clutched in the dead man's hand was the tiny golden jaguar.

The others had come into the hall. Craig glanced at them. The girl's eyes were fixed with frozen intensity on the statuette. The Indian was staring at it too. Fear was writhing across his heavy features.

"Hello," Bat Randall whistled. "They didn't get away with the loot." He bent over to remove the statuette from the dead man's fingers.

"Don't touch that!" Craig said sharply.

"Huh? Why not? You don't think this killed him, do you?"

"Is there a poison needle hidden in that thing?" Craig asked Lolita Montez.

"N—no," she whispered. "Or if there is, I do not know of it. But—" Her face was a wax mask.

"But what?"

"It has been in my family a long time," the girl whispered. "There is a legend about it. The legend says that if it is stolen, the thief will be instantly struck dead."

Craig started to speak and abruptly changed his mind. It was hot here in

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this hotel room but in spite of that Craig felt a touch of cold settle over him as he listened to the girl's words.

The same chill seemed to have touched all the others. Bat Randall's face was twisted into a wry grimace. The hotel manager nervously crossed himself, muttering a prayer to ward off the evil he sensed was here. The girl's lips were moving. Only the Indian seemed to have recovered from his fear. He belonged to the race that had carved this golden jaguar. His impassive face seemed to say that the death of this thief might seem impossible to the white men but to an Indian such a death was supremely logical. The gods knew all. The gods would destroy a thief. The gods hated thieves.

"Did the little statue kill him?" Bat Randall whispered.

CRAIG didn't answer. He remembered that the girl had held the statuette in her gloved hands. He had held it in his bare hands. And a shock had passed up his arm when he first touched it. He wondered how close to death he had been then!

Lolita Montez plucked at his sleeve. "You will not let this prevent you from making the trip, will you, *Senor* Craig?"

"Huh? Oh—" The flier had forgotten all about her request, he had forgotten the reward she had offered. He had demanded proof that she could do what she said. His eyes went down to the dead man, to the tiny statuette still clutched in the stiffening fingers. The dead man certainly proved something! Icy thoughts went through his mind as he wondered what it was.

"Do you know why these men tried to steal this statuette?"

"No." She shook her head. "Will you make the trip?"

"Yes."

Craig was gambling and he knew it. He was risking a plane that no longer was legally his, and he was risking his neck as well. If he lost, a finance company might call him a thief. It was a gamble, but all aviators, by the nature of their profession, are gamblers.

"We'll start in the morning," he said. "In the meantime, do you mind if I keep that statuette?"

The relief that flooded tht girl's face when he said he would go turned to surprise. "The little golden jaguar? You wish to keep it?"

"Yes. I would like to examine it."

Consternation showed on her face. "You will give it back tomorrow? I would like to keep it. It is what you call a heirloom."

"Certainly I'll give it back."

"Well — " She hesitated, glanced once at Pedro to see what he said. Imperceptibly the Indian nodded.

"Yes, you may keep it tonight," she said quickly.

Craig spent the better part of the night examining the tiny statuette. He handled it with extreme care, never touching it with his bare fingers. He even went down to the office and borrowed a magnifying glass.

"What do you make of it, boss?" Bat Randall asked.

"Nothing," the flier answered. "Except that the man who made it was about the best craftsman who ever lived."

"Is it really gold?"

"No doubt about that."

"Hot ziggity damn! We'll be rich, boss, if we can pull this off. Between you and me, I could use a few bucks."

Craig grinned at Randall's enthusiasm. "What do you think of Lolita Montez?" he asked.

"Think of her!" Randall rolled his eyes. "If you ask me, I think she's got curves in the right places."

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"Yes, but do you think she is to be trusted?"

"You mean maybe she's selling us a bill of goods?" Randall's face puckered into a worried frown. "Aw, boss, why would she do a thing like that?"

"I don't know," the flier shrugged. "I don't know how this thing killed a man either, but it did."

LOLITA Montez and her Indian shadow turned up very early the next morning. She was wearing riding boots and breeches and she was carrying a light but powerful sporting rifle. Pedro, burdened with a load that only an Indian could have carried, staggered along behind her.

"A good thing this is a freight carrying plane," Craig said, looking at the load.

"I have brought food, *Senor* Craig, and a tiny tent for me, and other things. We may be gone several days and it is good to make plans in advance." She smiled at Craig in a way that made Randall, who was busy checking the motor in the left wing, roll his eyes. "You are almost ready to take off? You have plenty of gas?"

"I have everything," Craig grunted. He did not add that to the other supplies he had put aboard had been included the heavy pistol which hung in a holster at his hip.

"You have the little golden jaguar?"

"It's in the cabin. Ready, Bat?"

"All set," the mechanic answered.

With motors roaring, the plane lifted itself above the waters of the harbor of Callao, swept in a great circle, and turned east. The city became a tiny town far below them. Ahead of them the Andes climbed up into the sky. Craig lifted the ship to meet the challenge of the mountains.

On foot the trip would have taken months, if it could have been made at all. The plane crossed mountain ranges where even a llama would not have found secure footing. Craig followed the trail outlined on the ancient map. Crossing peaks that only the condors knew, across valleys that were thousands of feet deep, flying through intermittent clouds and mists, at last they spotted a tiny blue lake. Craig set the nose of the ship down. The sight of the lake sent tension mounting through him. The map had indicated that such a lake existed. Here was proof that the map was correctly drawn. If the lake existed, did the treasure of the Incas, hidden in a ruined city beside it, also exist?

The hull threw a spray of water to both sides as the ship settled down on the lake. Craig taxied toward a sandy beach on the north shore. Behind the beach a strip of jungle masked the face of a huge cliff that ran along the edge of the lake.

"Hey, boss, look at that!" Randall said.

The aviator followed the line of the mechanic's pointing hand. Located on the strip of land between the edge of the lake and the cliff, half hidden by the jungle growth, was—the ruins of a city.

"See, it is as I told you," Lolita Montez said. "There are the ruins of the city of Chianlo."

CRAIG landed the plane on the sloping sandy beach. Pedro was the first one ashore. The Indian had not liked riding in an airplane and he seemed glad of a chance to get out of it. He vanished immediately into the jungle, returning by the time Craig and Randall had finished mooring the ship.

Leaving the mechanic on guard with the ship, Craig and Lolita Montez took Pedro with them and went to explore

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the ruins of Chianlo.

"This was the sacred city of the Incas," the girl said breathlessly. "It was their last place of refuge and the Conquistadores did not loot it. *Senor* Craig, there is every chance that the wealth of the Incas is still here."

To the left was the lake. Rising from the water, the ground sloped gently upward a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile to the cliffs, which rose hundreds of feet into the air and formed a dark and forbidding backdrop for the city. Barely visible among the undergrowth were huge stone blocks, fallen columns, tumbled masonry. Looking at the size of the blocks, the flier had the impression that giants had once lived here. Only giants could have carved these huge blocks.

"It is going to be some job to find this gold," Craig said grimly.

"Oh, we will find it. The little golden jaguar—" She stopped in sudden confusion. "I mean we will search for it until we do find it."

"You seem to have forgotten that we came here searching for your brother," Craig said, glancing at her.

The shadow of inward pain crossed her face. "No, I have not forgotten," she said. "We will find him too. Oh —" She tripped against something on the ground and fell heavily.

They were in an open space directly in front of the cliffs. Craig bent down to help her to her feet. His eyes fell on the object over which she had tripped. He forgot all about the girl.

The rusted hilt of an ancient sword was sticking out of the ground. It was this that she had tripped over. It was almost buried in the soft soil.

"What is it you have found?" Lolita Montez gasped.

Craig didn't answer. He had dropped to his knees and was tugging at another object that was almost buried. It came free—a rusted, corroded helmet of the type worn by the conquistadores, by the Spanish conquerors who had over-run Peru under Pizarro. He took one look at it—and involuntarily dropped it.

There was a skull inside it.

A MAN had died here. He had lain where he had fallen. Craig stared at the rusted helmet and sword in startled surprise. Even Pedro seemed perturbed, his stolid face losing some of its immobility.

"Dig," the Indian grunted. "Dig here. This right place."

Pedro dropped to his knees beside the flier and began to dig in the soft soil. He dug frantically, his eyes darting everywhere. He reminded Craig of a large and very eager bull dog hunting for suspected rats. He found a piece of armor, a battered breast plate that had rusted almost to nothingness, glanced once at it and tossed it aside.

He found another sword, then another helmet. They were almost on the surface.

"Two men were killed here," Craig said. "Apparently they were never buried but lay where they fell."

"Hah!" the Indian cried. "Got something here!"

He pounced on an object and jerked it free from the dirt. About a foot in diameter, it looked like a salad bowl.

"Let me see that!" Craig said. Reluctantly, the Indian relinquished hold of it. The flier quickly scrubbed the dirt from it. Scratching it with the point of the rusted sword, his shout rang out.

"It's made of gold! It's one of the golden vessels of the Incas!"

A FRANTIC hour later, a more extensive excavation had revealed

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these fact: Three men had died here. There were three swords, three helmets, three skeletons. Also there were the rusted barrels of ancient muskets.

Each of the three men had apparently been carrying a heavy load of vessels of various kinds, bowls, plates, things that looked like cups, such loot as would be taken from an Inca temple.

They were made of gold. While they weren't worth a fortune, they certainly represented a good-sized chunk of spending money.

"I got to give you credit, you certainly knew what you were talking about," Craig said to the girl. "When we find the temple where these things came from, we will probably be rich forever. What's the matter?"

Lolita Montez had taken no part in the digging. She had stood aside. Glancing at her, Craig saw that the normal brown of her face had turned a pasty white.

"Is something wrong?" the flier asked.

"No, no. There is nothing wrong. But there is one thing I did not tell you, *Señor* Craig."

"What?"

"You remember that map I showed you and the tiny golden jaguar?"

"Of course. What about them?"

"The map was made by my great-great-great-grandfather, who came here with Pizarro. He, and three companions, found their way to this city. The Incas had deserted it even then. Somewhere here they found a huge amount of gold. I do not know exactly where but they found it."

"Judging from what we have found, I don't doubt they made the discovery," Craig said. "What is there about that to frighten you?"

"You do not understand," the girl said. She was not looking at Craig. Her eyes were constantly searching the surrounding scene. She seemed to suspect the presence of some hidden, unseen danger and to be trying to detect it before it struck.

"If they found the gold and took it away, what is there to be scared of?"

"That is the point," the girl said quickly. "Except for my ancestor, who brought back the tiny golden jaguar, they did not take it away. They were starting to take it away, when three of them—all except my great-great-great-grandfather—*were struck dead!*"

"Three of them were struck dead!" Craig gasped. A sudden touch of cold settled over him as he glanced down at the skeletons they had uncovered. "Do you mean that you think these three men were the companions of your ancestor?"

"Yes. That is what I mean. I did not believe the story. I thought it was only a tradition—until we found these skeletons. Oh, *Senor* Craig, we must leave this place. There is danger here still, great danger. The same thing that struck down these three men, it is still here. I can feel it. It is in the air. It is watching from behind the trees. It is everywhere around us."

IN THE sudden silence that followed, the only sound was that of the Indian grunting. Abruptly, Lolita Montez went into hysterics. She started screaming and crying at the same time, clinging to Craig for protection.

"There is nothing, Miss Montez," the flier said. His words seemed to carry no conviction to her. To him, her story was pure superstition. If her ancestor had tried to loot this city and three of his companions had died, it merely meant that they had probably fallen victims to Indian arrows. But the girl seemed to believe that something else had happened to them. And in spite of himself, Craig found himself almost

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believing in her. After all, she had brought him here. That certainly proved there was some truth in her story. Craig's hand went down to his gun. He looked everywhere. The blue waters of the lake were visible through the trees. Above them, almost leaning over them, was the face of the cliff. Somewhere in the jungle tangle a bird was calling. If there was danger here, he could not see it.

Then he noticed Pedro. The Indian had left off digging and had risen to his feet. He had drawn his knife and was scanning the jungle around them as if he, too, sensed the presence of some hidden menace.

"This is nonsense," Craig said firmly. "However, we will return to the plane."

He picked up the golden salad bowl to take with him. He wanted to show it to Randall. Bat would be pleased. If Craig got rich here, the mechanic would be cut in on the find, share and share alike. Probably Bat would use a part of his share to buy a plane motor, which he would disassemble in the morning and put together again each afternoon. A motor to tear apart and put back together again would be Randall's idea of heaven.

Craig was the only one who took any of the golden objects they had found. Lolita Montez looked to be too weak to carry anything. And Pedro seemed to have lost all interest in the treasure he had dug so hard to find. The Indian kept his knife in his hand. He watched the jungle around them as if he expected it to erupt with enemies at any moment.

But nothing happened. If death lurked near them in the green tangle, it gave no sign that it was aware of their existence.

The plane was still resting on the sandy beach. At the sight of the ship, Craig's rising fears vanished. Despite the fact that he knew it was superstition, the actions of the girl and the Indian had worried him. When they reached the plane, his spirits lifted.

"Hey, Bat," he yelled, jerking open the door of the cabin and holding up the golden bowl. "Look what we found."

There was no answer.

Craig stepped into the main cabin. The interior of the ship was a hellish mess. Their belongings, their food supplies, everything, was scattered everywhere.

Bat Randall was gone.

CHAPTER III

Treachery

ONE fact was instantly obvious. The ship had been thoroughly but hurriedly searched. Here in this wilderness in the hinterland of Peru, with almost impassible mountains to the west and with the hell jungles of the upper Amazon to the east, were thieves! No wild Indians, and if there were any Indians around here, they were certainly wild, would willingly approach within a mile of an airplane.

Then who had pillaged the ship? And what had happened to Bat Randall?

Looking through the door of the plane, Craig saw footprints in the sandy beach. The prints had been made by hob-nailed boots. Neither he nor anyone else in his party wore such boots. He dropped from the door of the cabin to the beach to examine the tell-tale prints.

Crash!

A rifle spoke from the jungle growth below the cliff. The bullet screamed through the open cabin door where he had stood a second before. It whanged against the other side of the ship, ripped through the metal, smacked into the lake.

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When Craig hit the ground, he was running. He knew a bullet when he heard one, and he knew that if he had paused for a second in the cabin door, the bullet would have got him.

As he raced across the beach he caught a glimpse of Lolita Montez and Pedro among the trees above him.

"Down!" he shouted at them.

A second bullet whined over his head, emphasizing the order. The girl and the Indian ducked quickly out of sight. The flier threw himself flat on the ground in a tangle of jungle shrubbery, jerked his pistol from its holster.

Lolita Montez had been right when she sensed the presence of danger! Death did guard the forgotten city of Chianlo. It had been waiting, back at the plane, for them.

Craig hugged the ground, waiting for a third shot that would reveal where the killer was hidden. No third shot came. He wondered what had happened to Randall. Had the mechanic been shot from ambush and his body dumped into the lake? The thought sent a surge of anger through the flier. Randall was his best friend. Then he realized they would have certainly heard the rifle if Bat had been shot. They had heard nothing. Which meant that maybe Bat was still alive. And maybe wasn't. A knife made no sound.

Craig waited as long as he could, then began a slow cautious circuit of the place from which the shots had come. He caught a glimpse of the killer. It wasn't an Indian. It was a white man. Clad in a dirty khaki shirt, a growth of beard on his face, a cap thrust back on his head, he was kneeling behind a fallen tree. Head and gun thrust forward, the killer was watching the clump of shrubbery where Craig had first taken refuge.

Craig lifted his pistol, took steady aim, then slowly lowered the gun. He had no compunctions about shooting this man. But—he might miss. The distance was too great for the pistol. If he missed with the first shot, the man with the rifle would have him at his mercy.

Wiggling on his belly, he kept moving until he was behind the man with the rifle and within ten feet of him.

"Hands up!" the flier grimly ordered.

THE killer jumped like a startled cat. He spun on his feet, looked behind him, tried to bring up the rifle, looked straight into the muzzle of Craig's pistol—and saw death looking at him. He hastily dropped the rifle.

"That's better," Craig said. "You were within a fraction of a second of getting what you deserve. Back away from that rifle and turn around."

Khaki Shirt hastily did as he was ordered. He didn't in the least like the grim look on the flier's face. Craig stepped forward, picked up the rifle, which was an excellent weapon of a European make. A search revealed a pistol in Khaki Shirt's pocket. Craig appropriated that too.

"Now who are you?" he demanded. "What are you doing here?"

There was despair on Khaki Shirt's face, and terror, but he didn't answer. Instead he shook his head.

"How would you like a bullet through the guts?" Craig said. "Maybe that would open you up enough so you could talk."

The flier was bluffing. He wouldn't shoot a prisoner, no matter how much that prisoner might deserve to be shot. But the prisoner didn't know that.

Khaki Shirt's face showed that he believed what Craig had said. His hands began to tremble and a convulsive tremor shook his body. But scared as he was of Craig, he was more scared of something else. He wouldn't talk.

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Craig marched him back to the plane.

"Did—did you cap—capture him?" Lolita Montez' voice quavered from somewhere.

"Yes," said Craig grimly. "Come out here and see if you recognize him."

Closely followed by Pedro, the girl came out of the clump of trees where she had been hiding. She had the light rifle in a firm grip and she was holding it as if she knew exactly how to use it. There was frank and undisguised admiration in her eyes as she looked at the flier.

"Oh, *Señor* Craig, you did capture him—*Drop that gun!*"

She stepped behind the flier. He felt a sharp stab of pain as the muzzle of her rifle was rammed into his back.

"What the devil—" the startled flier gasped.

"Drop that gun or I'll shoot!" she answered.

"But—" Craig choked. He wouldn't, couldn't, believe that this girl who seemed to have stepped straight out of a convent— The jab of the rifle against his back told him that another second's delay would send a bullet crashing through his spinal column. He let Khaki Shirt's rifle fall to the ground. Khaki Shirt hurriedly leaped forward and picked it up. Pedro seized Craig's pistol.

"THAT was fast thinking," Khaki Shirt said admiringly to the girl. "You are to be congratulated. Our leader will hear of this."

"You little vixen!" Craig gasped. "You were lying to me all the time."

"We needed your plane to get our selves and the statuette here," Lolita Montez said, flushing at his hot tone. "Yes, I lied to you. It was so easy. Show you Americans a pretty face and a curving hip line and you all fall over yourselves to be suckers."

"We do, do we?" Craig choked off the hot words. He had been played for a sucker by a girl! That was hard to take but losing his temper would not get him anywhere. "What's the pay-off on this treachery?" he snapped.

"The pay-off is millions in Inca gold that is really here," Lolita Montez answered. "I wasn't lying to you about that, *Señor* Craig!"

"What good will it do you? Even if it is here you can't get it out of these mountains."

"You forget we have your plane," the girl suavely answered.

"So what? If you think I'll fly it for you—"

Craig was so angry he scarcely heard Khaki Shirt's voice.

"*Señorita* Montez, shall I shoot him now?" Khaki Shirt said.

"Shoot me?" Craig gasped.

Even the girl looked startled. "No," she said quickly. "It will not be necessary to shoot him."

"What kind of a pirate crew do you belong to?" Craig demanded.

"No pirate crew, sir!" the girl said hotly.

Another voice spoke, a harsh guttural voice, the voice of Pedro.

"Shoot him!" the Indian said.

"No!" Lolita Montez cried sharply.

"Yah!" said the Indian.

Turning, Craig saw that Khaki Shirt was bringing up the rifle for the cold-blooded murder of a helpless prisoner. And Khaki Shirt looked as if he was going to enjoy pulling the trigger of that gun. The sight was sickening.

With his right hand Craig knocked the rifle upward. Up to the wrist he drove his left fist into Khaki Shirt's belly. Every ounce of the flier's weight was behind the blow. The rifle exploded over his shoulder. Khaki Shirt's mouth flew open.

"Uck!" he said.

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As he struck the man, Craig was moving. He kept right on moving. Man of War coming down the home stretch never moved faster than did Craig as he dived for the protection of the trees. Pedro had a pistol and a knife, the girl had her light rifle. Pedro might not be able to use the pistol effectively, but Craig was willing to bet the girl could handle the rifle.

Crack!

The spiteful crack of the rifle sounded and a bullet screamed past him.

THE distance to the trees was not great. He could make it in seconds. And, if he didn't make it in seconds, he would never make it.

The pistol boomed and a slug tore a hole in the air within inches of his head.

Another ten steps, another five steps! He was among the trees! He was safe. Only a lucky shot could ever hit him here. Dodging among the trees, fighting his way through the tangle of creepers, he kept on running.

Glancing back, he caught a flash of bronze among the trees.

Pedro was following him! The Indian was on his trail!

In a fair fist fight, Craig might be able to whip the Indian. He was a foot taller than Pedro but the Indian was built like a barrel and was unquestionably very strong. Besides, he was armed, and Craig wasn't. The flier's only hope was to outdistance him, to lose him in the jungle.

He fought his way through briars, through creeping vines that tore at him, impeding his progress. A bullet whanged past him. He kept on running. He knew if he didn't lose Pedro soon, he was done. His breath was coming in gasping heaves and a stitch was beginning to appear in his side.

He would have preferred to stop and fight but to stop was to invite death. Craig could hear the Indian tearing along behind him. Pedro's barrel chest, developed in a high altitude, enabled him to keep running forever. He seemed tireless. With every stride he was closing the gap between them. The growing pain in his side warned the flier he could go no farther. His only choice was to stop and fight.

Ahead was a huge tree. Craig staggered toward it, intending to put his back against it for a last stand. He could run no farther. He knew he was too winded to fight effectively but he had no choice. As he stumbled toward the tree, he saw something that sent his heart up into his mouth. For a second he hesitated, wondered if he really saw what he thought he did.

Bat Randall was hiding behind the tree. Just the side of his face was projecting around the trunk.

"Come on, boss," Randall whispered fiercely, jerking his thumb to show his meaning. "Run him past me."

CRAIG changed his direction, staggered past the tree, stumbled, and fell. Pedro came charging through the underbrush just in time to see the flier trying to get to his feet. With a whoop, the Indian leaped in for the kill.

As Pedro ran past the tree, Bat Randall stepped out from behind it and hit him over the head with a wrench. The Indian fell like he had been hit with an axe. Sprawling on all fours, he smashed through a tangle of briars and hit the dirt. He didn't move after he hit. Craig sat down and gasped for breath.

"Hard head these Indians got," Bat Randall said, hefting his wrench to see if a second blow was necessary.

"Is—is he dead?"

"I'm afraid not," the mechanic said, regret in his voice. "But he'll have a headache that will last for years." Randall appropriated the knife and pistol

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Pedro had been carrying.

"Where—where did you come from?" Craig panted. "I saw the plane had been turned inside out—and I thought you were dead."

"I was out in the bushes when the lads arrived to take the plane," Randall said, his tone apologizing for the fact that he hadn't been in the ship to defend it. "They didn't see me and since there were four of them, all well armed, and only one of me, I didn't think it worth while to call attention to my presence. I've been hiding out here trying to see what I could see ever since. I tried to find you, but I missed connections, and I was heading back to the ship when all the shooting started. Then I heard you coming through the bulrushes with Chief Knot on the Head here trying to tag you with his scalping knife. Boss, what the hell's going on in these parts anyhow?"

"Piracy and murder," Craig answered bitterly. He told what had happened.

"So Miss Fancy Pants was taking us for a ride all the time!" Randall said, amazed. "That little witch! I never did trust her. And she really knows where this gold is located! But why didn't she just pull a gun on us and take over when we first landed? Why did she tag along with you over to the ruins?"

"I think she was waiting for the rest of the gang to arrive," Craig answered. "Those four fellows who searched the plane were obviously already here. But she had to give them time to reach the ship. Meanwhile, if she could split us up and take us separately, it would be easier."

"Much easier," Randall agreed. "We're in a pickle, boss. What the heck are we going to do!"

"Wait until night and capture our plane," Craig said grimly. "We'll fly out of here. When we come back, we'll have the ship loaded with men we can trust. We can pick up half a dozen Americans in Callao who will like nothing better than to come back here and help us thin out this gang of pirates."

"SORRY, boss," Randall said, shaking his head. "But that idea won't work."

"Why won't it work? It has to work. We've got to get the ship back into our possession. It's our only way of getting out of this jungle. Don't you think we can take the ship?"

"Sure, but it won't do us any good."

"Huh? What the devil are you hinting at?"

"The four thugs who raided it, took the precaution of removing the points from the distributors," Randall said. "I was watching them while they did it. Even if we grab the plane, it won't fly. Boss, we're stuck here."

The plane had been sabotaged. Vital parts had been removed from the mechanism of the motors. Craig and Randall were marooned in a mountain wilderness.

"Then we'll have to take the pirates first," the flier said, getting to his feet. "We've got to get those distributor points." He started toward the ruins of Chianlo. Since the gold was hidden somewhere among the ruins, Lolita Montez and her gang of cut-throats would be there too.

"What are we going to do with him?" Randall asked, pointing to the still unconscious Indian.

"I'd like to slit his throat," Craig answered. "But we'll leave him where he is. That's all we can do."

"Maybe a jaguar will get him tonight," the mechanic said hopefully.

* The distributor is the mechanism which times the firing of the cylinders. The points are the electrical connection ends which contact the rotor as it spins, and complete the circuit which makes each cylinder fire in proper order.—Ed.

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CHAPTER IV

In the Inca Temple

WHILE Craig and Randall warily made their way through the jungle, the shadows of night lengthened across the mountains. Black tropic darkness had fallen by the time they reached the ruins of Chianlo.

Across the broken ruins, up near the cliffs, was a moving spot of ilumination.

"What's that, boss?" Randall whispered.

"A flashlight," Craig diagnosed. "That's where we're going."

In the open space in front of the cliffs where they had discovered the three skeletons they found Lolita Montez. Four men, including Khaki Shirt, whom Craig recognized, were with her. Watching from the shelter of a huge block of stone, Craig saw that the girl seemed to be taking little part in what was going on. Khaki Shirt was playing the leading role.

The thug had thrust something into the end of a split stick. Holding the stick over his head, he was walking slowly back and forth along the face of the cliff. Straining his eyes, Craig saw what was in the end of that stick.

It was the tiny golden jaguar.

"They look like they're witching for water," Randall whispered.*

"I think they're witching for gold," Craig answered.

"A fine chance they've got of finding it by witching for it," Randall grunted.

"I don't know," Craig demurred. "The craftsmen who carved that statuette may have known more than we credit them with. That little golden jaguar may be the key that will reveal —look at that!"

Held in the end of the stick, the statuette had begun to glow with a dim blue light. The second the light appeared Khaki Shirt shouted with triumph. The others gathered around him, all of them eagerly staring at the statuette. Closely watching the little golden ornament, Khaki Shirt began to move again.

When he moved away from the cliff, the glow lessened. When he moved closer to the cliff, the glow brightened.

"It *is* the key to the source of the gold we found!" Craig gasped. Wondering how the little ornament worked, he decided it must be similar to an electroscope. "That can't be right," he said to himself. "An electroscope is an electrical device, and the Incas knew nothing of electricity. Or did they?"

"Golly, boss, look at that!" Randall gasped.

As though a huge door was opening, a section of the cliff was swinging aside. Khaki Shirt was right against the stone, so close that Craig could not tell whether or not the thug had found and operated some mechanism the little ornament had revealed. But whatever was the cause, a door was opening in the cliff. Three or four feet above the ground level, a ten foot section of what had looked like solid stone was swinging aside. Silently, ponderously, as though a tremendous weight was balanced so a slight force exerted at the proper place would move it either way, a door was opening, revealing a slanting tunnel running slightly upward and into the cliff itself. A dim blue glow, like the glow from the statuette, came from the tunnel.

* Witching for water by means of hazel wands or other forked sticks is an ancient practice, the purpose of which is to locate veins of underground water. The person doing the witching takes a V-shaped wand cut from a tree, grasps the ends firmly in both hands, and walks back and forth with the point of the V held upward. According to belief held in many parts of the world, when the witch is over water the point of the V will dip strongly downward. It is reported that many wells have been located in this matter.—Ed.

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"Hurrah!" Khaki Shirt shouted. "We've found it."

HE LEAPED upward into the tunnel opening, vanished inside. His three companions quickly followed him. Lolita Montez went last. She had difficulty climbing up into the tunnel opening and no one helped her.

"Come on," Craig said, starting forward.

"Where the hell are we going?" Randall asked.

"After them."

"It's all right with me but they've all got guns. We've got one pistol with six shots in it and one knife."

"We've got surprise, too," Craig answered. "They don't know we're within miles of them. If we don't get them now, while they're busy gawking, we may never have another chance. Come."

Pistol in hand, Craig ran across the open space toward the cliff. He heard Randall's feet pounding behind him. With a single leap, the flier vaulted into the tunnel, and raced on tip-toe upward.

The tunnel slanted upward a few yards, then opened into a single vast room which had apparently been carved from the solid rock. It was filled with a dim blue radiance that came from a single source.

The four thugs and the girl were across the room staring in awe at the source from which the radiance sprang. Piled everywhere within the vast room were—jars, temple ornaments, plates, huge stacks of them.

This was the treasure house of the Incas! Enough gold was here to ransom a dozen kings.

"Great gollywhoppers!" Bat Randall whispered. "We've hit the jackpot!"

Khaki Shirt and his gang were gathered at the far end of the temple. Above them on a stone pedestal was a gigantic statue—of a crouching jaguar. It was the same in every detail as the tiny statuette that had been the key to this treasure house, except that it was many times larger than even a real jaguar. The vanished priests who had built this stronghold had apparently set up the statue as an idol, and as a key to their secret hiding place they had carved a tiny duplicate of the larger image. It was a clever idea. If you follow the cub, you will find the lioness. If you knew how to follow the clue hidden in the tiny statuette, it would lead you here.

Like a gigantic guard, the jaguar seemed to keep watch over the golden-treasury of its vanished master. It crouched, head down, legs drawn up, eyes focused on the tunnel, ready to leap upon any one who entered this forbidden place.

THE dim blue radiance that filled the temple came from it. Just as a glow had come from the statuette, a glow came from the statue. Vaguely it illumined the whole room.

"What is that thing?" Khaki Shirt was saying, staring at the idol.

"Hands up!" Craig said harshly.

His voice froze the group clustered around the statue.

"I'll shoot the first man who moves," he rasped. "Drop those rifles!"

Khaki Shirt turned. "It's the damned flier!" he gasped. "I thought that guy was dead."

"I'm not dead but you will be if you don't drop that gun," Craig rasped.

Would they obey him? Or would they defy him? If they chose to leap aside and throw up their rifles, they could mow him down. There were five of them, counting the girl, all armed. If they chose to start shooting, he wouldn't have a chance, and he knew it.

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Craig saw the same idea occur to Khaki Shirt. The thug glanced sideways at his companions.

"You may get me but I'll get the first one," the flier said harshly. "Drop that gun!"

Khaki Shirt's tongue ran around his lips, but he still held on to his weapon. Craig tensed himself to shoot.

For a second, the spell held. Then a rifle clattered on the floor. It came from Lolita Montez. She had dropped her gun. As though this was a signal the other four dropped their weapons.

"That's better," Craig said, wiping sweat off his forehead.

"*Senor* Craig," Lolita Montez cried. "Oh, I'm so glad—" She started toward him. A smile lit her face.

"Keep away from me!" Craig rasped, centering his pistol on her.

She kept coming.

"But you do not understand, *Senor* Craig. I am really not with *these.*" A wave of her hand indicated the four men.

"I understand well enough," Craig said. "If you come another step closer, I'll shoot."

She was stalling him, she was trying to get close enough to him to grab at his gun, after which the four thugs would swarm over him. She had played him for a sucker once. Now she was trying to take advantage of the fact that she was a woman.

"You would shoot—a girl?" she gasped.

"Not if I can help it. But if you take another step, I won't be able to help it."

THAT stopped her. Amazement, incredulity, fear, showed on her face. But she stopped coming toward him. Craig breathed a little easier.

"Bat, get those guns," he said.

The mechanic started forward to obey. Lolita Montez opened her mouth and screamed.

Crack!

Something hit Craig from behind, a savage, stunning blow that sent stars whirling before his eyes. He whirled, fired blindly, staggered backward, trying to see who had hit him.

It was Pedro. The Indian had recovered consciousness and by some miracle of jungle trailing, had followed them here. He had slipped up behind them. Now the flier knew why the girl had stalled him. She had seen Pedro entering and had deliberately held Craig's attention while the Indian slipped up behind him.

"You little rat!" he gasped. "I should have known you were tricking me!"

"Guns!" Pedro shouted.

Lolita Montez screamed at the top of her voice. Craig knew without looking that the four thugs were grabbing for their rifles. Pedro was coming toward him. He fired again, and missed. Coming from behind, a bullet screamed past him. A rifle roared and echoes whooped back from the interior of the temple.

Craig ducked to the right, ran to the rear. He would have preferred to try to get outside but if he leaped down the tunnel, he would provide a perfect target for the rifles inside. He ran behind the huge idol.

In front of the statue, the four thugs were scurrying for cover. Something came sailing out of the dimness, struck one of them, staggered him. Off to the left Craig caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure. It was Bat Randall. The mechanic had taken refuge behind one of the piles of golden vessels, which he was chunking at the thugs as fast as he could throw them. The heavy golden bowls made excellent missiles. One of them struck Khaki Shirt,

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knocked him sprawling.

Craig took deliberate aim at one of the thugs, squeezed the trigger. The pistol roared. The man threw up his hands, staggered backward. He fell into the entrance of the tunnel, slid down it and outside.

"Give 'em hell, boss!" Bat Randall was shouting. A barrage of golden ornaments was sailing through the air.

THERE was pandemonium in the ancient Inca treasure house. Rifles seemed to be barking everywhere. The air was dank with the raw odor of smokeless powder. Bat Randall was yelling at the top of his voice. Rifle bullets were whanging past him but Randall was jumping like a billy goat and never presented a good target. Craig, except for his head and arm, was out of sight behind the pedestal that supported the idol.

"We'll win this fight yet, Bat," he shouted. They had every chance to win it. The attackers could not come at them without exposing themselves.

Spang, spang, spang! Rifles roared. "Eeeyow!" Bat Randall yelled. Craig fired once at a shadowy rifleman, groaned as he missed. He heard an unintelligible shout, saw figures moving, brought up his pistol to shoot, then lowered it. The thugs weren't charging. They were going in the opposite direction. They were running! Like firemen going to a five-alarm blaze, they were leaping into the slanting tunnel and vanishing outside.

Suddenly the temple was silent. There wasn't a sound. The air was heavy with the tartness of powder smoke. The dim blue radiance flowed evenly from the huge idol.

"We licked 'em, boss," Bat Randall broke the silence. "They run out on us. They took a powder. They could dish it out but they couldn't take it. Hell, boss, we've won this fracas."

For a mad second, Craig hoped the mechanic was right. Then he realized the real meaning of this sudden retreat.

"Hell, Bat, we haven't won!" he gasped. "We're inside and they're outside. We can't get out. We're caught like rats in a trap."

"But if we can't get out, they can't come in," the mechanic pointed out. "If we're stymied, so are they. Of course," he added doubtfully, "nobody could say we're in any shape to stand a seige, without anything to eat or drink. Hell, boss, we're in a mint, but before we get out of here, we may be willing to trade all this gold for a hamburger and a bottle of beer."

"I'd be willing to make that trade right now," Craig said. "Especially if I could work it so our necks would be thrown in. The trouble is, those boys outside are not going to be willing to do any trading. They've got us behind the eight ball and they know it. All they have to do is wait and we'll fall into their arms like a couple of over-ripe lemons."

WAITING was not to be the order of the day for the pirates. Sounds of strenuous activity came from outside. Craig ventured into the tunnel to see what was going on. A rifle bullet drove him back inside. But before he was driven away he had seen enough to know what was going to happen.

"What are they going to do, boss?" Randall asked.

"They're chopping down small trees, piling them in front of the entrance, and they've already got a fire started," Craig said. "Bat, did you ever smoke a rabbit out of a hole?"

"Huh?" There was apparent horror in the mechanic's voice.

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"That's what they're going to do to us," Craig said. "Smoke us out of here like a couple of rabbits out of a hole."

Already he could hear the crackle of flames outside, and a streamer of fire, like the tongue of some gigantic and deadly snake, licked into the tunnel. A spume of smoke followed it. Down the tunnel they could catch glimpses of the gang outside busy piling leaves and green branches on the flames. Smoke billowed upward. Apparently there was a draft from an opening somewhere overhead for the tunnel seemed to act like the flue of a fireplace. Smoke, sucked upward, poured into the temple. Craig could hear Randall coughing and spitting.

"Boss," the mechanic choked. "Let's go out and take 'em."

"They would shoot us to pieces before we even got outside."

"Don't give a damn—cough—cough. Sitting Bull here," he gestured up toward the crouching idol, "may be able to eat smoke, but I can't. I say we go out and have a try at 'em before they finish us off." The mechanic started toward the tunnel.

"And I say we don't," Craig said fiercely, seizing Randall and dragging him back. "I've just thought of something."

"What is it, a way out of here?"

"No," Craig shouted. "It's three dead men!"

"Three dead men! Have you gone off your nut?"

But Craig didn't answer. He had already leaped to the huge stone block that served as a base for the crouching jaguar. Smoke was swirling faster and faster into the temple, forming a thick, choking cloud, almost blinding him. He groped his way toward the idol. It was as big as an elephant. He reached out and touched it. Of all the things the big flier had done in his life, touching that idol was the most difficult. He suspected anything might happen. But—nothing happened. A faint tingling sensation passed up his arm. That was all.

"You doing any good?" Randall choked from below.

"Not yet," Craig answered. "Ah!"

HE HADN'T known what he expected to find but the mechanism he discovered was so simple a moron could have operated it. Craig did not know that it would work. It had worked once, he knew, but that was long ago.

"Get back!" he screamed at Randall.

From his position on the head of the crouching jaguar, he could look directly down the slanting tunnel. He realized that the position of the idol was purposeful. It had been set in this particular spot and in this exact position for a reason.

Flames were pouring into the opening of the tunnel. Beyond the flames, hurrying up with more green leaves, he could see Pedro. Beside the Indian, staring eagerly up into the tunnel for the two rabbits he was smoking out of this hole, was Khaki Shirt. Two other thugs, plainly illumined by the leaping fire, were in sight. They were standing beside the excavation Craig and Pedro had made in digging for the golden salad bowl. Rifles ready, they were looking upward, waiting for the rabbits to run screaming from the hole in which they were caught, waiting for the smoke to blind and suffocate the helpless rabbits. They were grinning, Khaki Shirt was grinning, even Pedro was grinning.

"Take this, damn you!" Craig shouted. He pressed the left ear of the idol.

The heavens seemed to burst wide

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open in the roar of sound that followed. A battery of ack-ack, all guns letting go at once, would not have made more noise. In the confined space of the temple, the roar was deafening.

Before the brilliance blinded him, Craig caught a glimpse of a jolting flash of light stab down the slanting tunnel. It looked exactly like lightning. A bolt of radiance as big as a basketball grooved through the air and smashed headlong into the ground outside. It struck Khaki Shirt dead center, and exploded as it struck. For a blinding second the radiance roared through the air. Where it grounded itself outside, it threw dazzling coruscations of light in every direction. Like a fountain of water that had suddenly spouted into existence, and as it spouted had turned to fire, it sprayed upward from the spot where it was grounding. Craig caught a glimpse of Pedro trying to throw up his arms as he fell. White flame was spouting over him. He fell and wiggled and ceased moving.

Then Craig ceased seeing and ceased hearing. The jolting radiation that had leaped from the crouching jaguar had temporarily blinded him. The roar had deafened him. He clung to the side of the idol, wondering if he would ever see again, if he would ever hear.

A LITTLE by little he began to hear again. From a great distance a voice shouted at him.

"Great golly whoppers, boss!" the voice screamed. "What in hell happened?"

"Lightning," Craig croaked. "This idol was charged. The white flash that leaped from the idol's nose to the ground outside was a lightning bolt."

"Huh?" Randall sounded dazed. "How did it happen to go off just when we needed it?"

"I set it off," Craig choked. He still couldn't see but he was beginning to hear better. "There's a place up here for a priest to sit and watch. The left ear is a switch. You push it and bingo! This whole thing is a trap set up to guard the gold here."

"Lightning! Boss, those old priests didn't know anything about electricity," Randall protested.

"The hell they didn't," Craig answered. "You saw what happened, didn't you? I don't know what kind of batteries they used—perhaps this whole set-up is recharged every time a thunderstorm comes along—but whatever they used, it is still in working order. Even that little statuette was charged. The shock I got from it gave me the clue on what to look for here, that and the three skeletons outside. Those three Spaniards who had raided this place were killed by a bolt from this idol. The city must have been almost deserted then, perhaps just one or two priests left. One was enough to knock off all the thieves who tried to raid the joint. Hey, Bat, I can see again!" the flier shouted.

"I'm beginning to see too," Randall answered. "Come on down from Sitting Bull and let's see what results your thunderbolt got."

The fire at the exit had been blown in every direction and smoke was no longer pouring into the temple. Very gingerly Craig stuck his head out. No one took a shot at him and he jumped the rest of the way.

Khaki Shirt had been burned almost beyond recognition. The main bolt had struck him. Tatters of scorched khaki clinging to a charred body served to identify him. The two thugs who had been standing with ready rifles had apparently been killed by the shock. Pedro lay where he had fallen. The fifth man was lying farther away. He

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had been wounded in the fight in the temple and had been dead before the lightning flashed.

"Boss," said Bat Randall dazedly. "We won this fracas."

"We sure as hell did," Craig answered. "But—where is that she cat who tricked us into this business in the first place? Until I find her, I won't ever feel safe."

"In that case, *Senor* Craig," a voice said from the cliff behind them, "you can start feeling unsafe, for here I am."

LOLITA MONTEZ was standing in the entrance to the temple. She had never left the underground cavern but had hidden behind one of the piles of golden ornaments. There she had remained in safety until the fight was over.

"Look out!" Bat Randall yelled. "She's got a gun!"

The girl had her light rifle clasped in her hands.

"I see it!" Craig answered. "Don't run. She doesn't look like she wants to shoot."

The girl seemed dazed. She made no effort to cover them with the rifle. She stared around her at the destruction the flash of lightning had wrought, then dropped to the ground, and came toward the two men.

"Are—are they dead?" she faltered.

"Every one, Craig answered.

"Thank God!" the girl exclaimed. She dropped the rifle and began to sob.

Craig calmly stepped forward and picked up the rifle. She made no effort to stop him. "All right," he said. "Let's see you trick us again."

"Please, *Senor* Craig, I was never tricking you. What I did, I had to do."

"No doubt," the flier said. He had bitter memories of this girl and no inclination to trust her.

"I mean it," she sobbed. "If I had not done what I did, I would have been killed. When I came to you in your hotel, I lied to you. I admit it. I had no choice. Please believe me, *Senor*."

"Poppycock!" Craig snorted. "Who was threatening you?"

He didn't believe a word she had said.

"Fifth columnists," she said.

"What?"

"It's true. I admit I was one of them for a while, but I realized they were wrong and tried to get out. They wouldn't let me, especially since I had given them a copy of the map to this place. Believe me, *Senor*, what they wanted was your plane and the gold. They were already searching here for the gold, but the map wasn't enough. They have a secret radio here and they radioed one of their men in Lima to get the little jaguar, which they had decided, from a study made here, was the key to the hiding place. If they found the gold, they were going to use your plane to fly it up the Amazon to the east coast. From there it would have been flown to Africa and from there to Europe. Believe me, *Senor* Craig, when I tell you that the Nazis were seeking this gold to build up their war chest."

INCREDULOUSLY Craig listened. Was this girl telling the truth? It sounded plausible. There was a war going on in the world and gold was a vital weapon. The Nazis would certainly stop at nothing to get the gold they needed so badly. And, given a good plane, it was possible to fly the gold from the Andes to Europe, in a few hops. Commercial planes, bombers, were making the trip every day.

"I don't believe it," Craig said. "No one was threatening you when you came to my hotel in Callao and gave

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me that sob story. You're still lying."

"I was being threatened," Lolita Montez insisted. "By Pedro. If I had made one wrong move, he would have driven his knife into me."

"By Pedro!" Craig gasped. "That Indian—"

"He isn't an Indian and his name isn't Pedro," the girl said. "He's a Nazi and his real name is Hans Ullner. He was in disguise. If you don't believe me, rub some of that paint off of him and see for your own self."

"A German in disguise!" Craig echoed. "I still don't—" Abruptly he stopped speaking and walked to where the fallen Indian lay. He began to rub at the dead man's skin.

The brown color was caused by a stain. It rubbed off in the flier's fingers, revealing a white skin underneath.

"Holy jumping catfish!" Bat Randall gasped. "He's a spy. And we didn't know it. He was the big shot who was running the whole shebang all the time!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Montez," Craig choked. "I didn't know—"

"You can apologize when you have filled your big plane with gold and flown it—and all of us—back to Callao," the girl said. For the first time since Craig had met her she seemed to smile without any fear of the consequences.

THE END

LAND OF CONTRADICTIONS

By D. ROBARD

PROBABLY the most scientific land in the world is Iceland. Foreigners coming to Iceland usually expect to find a land of icebergs and fur clad people. Instead they find the winters in Iceland not even as cold as those of New York City. The climate approximates that of Milan, Italy. A Gulf Stream warms the air throughout the year. Iceland summers are slightly cooler than Chicago summers, but Iceland goes in for daylight saving in a big way during the summer months. You can go to bed at eleven p.m. and still read a book.

Icelanders, often looked upon as ignorant, are the most literate people in the world. Their Icelandic language is the oldest living language spoken on the face of the earth. Moreover, most Icelanders speak well, probably because Iceland has more books and newspapers per capita than any other country in the world.

In good old U. S. A. we think of ourselves as the best gadget equipped people in the world. We have electric egg beaters, washers, toasters, stoves, and so on; but Iceland goes us one better in this respect. Iceland leads the world in per capita electrical appliances. We may have more appliances, but a greater percentage of Iceland's population have electric gadgets available to them.

So opposed to war are the Icelanders that for centuries they have refused to have any army or navy. Their national anthem is the only one which completely leaves out any mention of war. Almost too good to be true is the fact that among Icelanders themselves there is almost no crime. Yes, there is a police force, but in two hundred years their police blotter has been stained with only one record of murder. This is the Utopia our writers have written about so often, right under our noses!

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HOLY CITY

Warren led his column forward in a furious charge

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OF MARS

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

THE blazing sun had set, and a chill green twilight gradually deepened over the red planet.

Then the garish floodlights of the canal city Andeldug flashed on, blotting out the black sky and the tiny twin moons of Mars.

Three long Martian years ago, three thousand earthmen of the Legion of Death had ridden their sliths like mad, with sabers held high and hell in their eyes, into Daloss, the City of Lost Souls, contrary to the orders of their Red Martian Colonel Ak-Ak, in a foolhardy attempt to rescue ten captured comrades from a fiery death on the golden altar of the black god Erlik.

Only terror lay in the Holy City of Daloss, but Don Warren went back to find Esta, the daughter of the chieftain—and to avenge the death of his entire regiment

All but one of those three thousand and ten had perished in this glorious adventure. And that one—Don Warren—had paid for his impetuousness with three years of penal servitude. The death penalty had been averted solely by Colonel Ak-Ak's fear of being censured for his failure to intercept the expedition; for sentences of death had to be reviewed by the Martian General Staff.

And now Don Warren was planning to return to the dread city of disaster; all because the well-remembered vision of a blue-eyed face, framed in an auriole of golden curls, lured him back—a girl named Esta, daughter of Mu-Lai, the bandit Mauro chieftain.

Exhausted—well nigh discouraged—the broad-shouldered young American soldier-of-fortune dragged his tired feet into one more Martian saloon. Would he find here a purchaser for his return-trip space-ship ticket to Earth, to which the termination of his enlistment in the Interplanetary Legion had entitled him? And, if not, would the scanty balance of his army pay last him until he found a purchaser? For only by selling that ticket at a fair price could he obtain enough rectangular Martian coins to equip him with a slith, a saddle and bridle for the beast, weapons, and enough compressed rations to carry him across the blazing red desert to his mecca, Daloss, City of Lost Souls, from which only one Earthman had ever returned.*

A YELLOW haze of orra-root fumes softened the garish light of the helium-tubes. A quartet of black Martians from the desert hills pounded out a wailing native tune on hollow-keyed zylophones. Gaunt Jovian giants, red

* See "City of Lost Souls," July, 1941, issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for the first of the stories of Martian Foreign Legion. In it, Don Warren and three thousand of his fellow legionnaires undertook a campaign to rescue several of their comrades who had been captured by the feared Mauros and taken to the legendary city of Daloss, never seen by white men. Only Warren returned alive from this disastrous venture.—Ed.

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Martian aristocrats, black Martian peasants, dainty antennaed Cupians and furry Vairkings from Venus, and pale Earthmen, rubbed elbows together in a cosmopolitan throng.

Picking his way through the jostling crowd, Don Warren found a vacant booth, and ordered a goblet of poolkay from an obsequious black waiter. Poolkay, distilled—Mexican style—from the red cacti of the deserts of Mars.

As Warren paid for the searing liquor with one of the last of his oblong bits of small change, his fingers gripped upon a coin with which he would never part—the thin gold strip which he had snatched from one of the coffers in the subterranean treasure-chamber of Daloss, as Esta had guided him and Captain Hammersmith—good old Hammy, now long dead of desert fever and madness—in their escape from the dungeons of Mu-Lai, the bandit king, Esta's father.

What a picture the feel of that coin now recalled to Warren's longing mind! The picture of Esta waving goodbye, as he and Hammersmith had galloped off on the two sliths which she had provided for their escape from her father. Curls of burnished gold. Skin, shell-pink. Eyes of sapphire blue. And a slim but voluptuous figure, half-concealed, half-revealed, by her flowing white shawl, and diaphanous garments beneath.

Would he ever see her flaming loveliness again?

Had she remained true to him through the three long Martian years of his imprisonment? Or had her fierce father forced her into an unloving union with her betrothed, the handsome swart Ab-Nadik?

Warren raised the fiery draught to his lips, but his mind was not on drinking nor on his surroundings; his mind's eye was on that glorious golden vision; his pulses raced and his senses tingled to the memory of the feel of her warm young body pressed softly against him. His Esta! His for all eternity, regardless what might befall.

A name—spoken in a well-remembered guttural voice in the next booth just beyond the dividing matting—snapped Don Warren out of his dream. The voice was that of his gross old Red Martian Colonel, Ak-Ak. And the name was that of Ben-Stu, Esta's brother!

"Sh!" another voice, a youthful voice, replied. "We may be overheard. And please don't keep repeating my name."

Heart beating rapidly, Don Warren pressed his ear against the reed-woven partition.

A testy guttural whisper, "Okeh, Ben-Stu, have it your own way. But how can we plot, if we do not talk? Now tell me how you plan to admit our troops into your father's stronghold?"

Ben-Stu's response was given in such a low tone that, strain his ears as he might, Warren could make out only a word or two. And even Colonel Ak-Ak now observed more caution.

All that Warren was able to gather from the conversation was that Ben-Stu was offering, for a price, to assist Ak-Ak's government troops to penetrate the hitherto unconquered golden City of Lost Souls.

Of course, all this might be a trap for the unwary Martian Colonel. Warren could not conceive of Esta's brother being a traitor to his father and his home.

UNABLE to make out any more of the conversation, which by now had dropped to an even lower tone, Warren settled back in his seat. But he had lost all desire for the fiery liquor which

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stood on the table in front of him. So he took out his pouch of ground orra-root, rolled a cigaret, inserted it in his long metallic cigaret-holder, lighted the tip, and puffed away ruminatively.

Where ought his loyalty lie? With the government of Mars, which he had sworn to support, uphold, and defend? Or with the brother of his beloved?

While he was mulling this problem over in his mind, the idea suddenly came: how did he know that the youth in the next booth really was the Ben-Stu that he claimed to be? And then another idea followed the first: this youth couldn't possibly be Ben-Stu, for Ben-Stu was dead!

True, Don Warren had never seen Esta's brother lying dead. Nor had he ever seen the boy alive, for that matter. But he remembered now what he had heard and seen upon regaining consciousness on the cobblestones of the main thorofare of Daloss in the first mad assault of the Legion of Death on that City of Lost Souls.

Esta's mother, a hawk-faced crone, had been slitting the throats of the wounded Legionnaires, but Esta had recoiled with horror and had refused to join in that pleasant little pastime.

Then had come the mother's wail: "Great Erlik! It is my son, your brother Ben-Stu, who lies here! The cursed Earthmen have slain him!"

She had gathered the body in her arms, and the beautiful Esta, with a sudden access of fury, had cried: "Give me the knife, mother. I can kill them *now!*"

Esta had strode directly toward the spot where Warren lay, still stunned by his fall from his slith. A long kris was in her slender little hand. Her golden curls were stirring in the wind.

But when her blue eyes met those of her intended victim, it had been love at first sight for both of them, a love which—at least so far as the Earthman was concerned—would last through all eternity.

Yes, Ben-Stu was dead. And so the young man in the next booth must be an impostor. But impostor or trickster, what mattered it? Either role boded ill for the government of Mars, if Colonel Ak-Ak were to place his trust in his young companion. For the possibility of Ben-Stu betraying his own city to the enemy never entered Warren's head.

Ought Warren warn the Colonel? Colonel Ak-Ak had been responsible for the failure of the Legion's attack on Daloss three years ago. Let him now pay the penalty by leading a fiasco himself.

THE two men in the next booth arose, and began worming their way through the milling crowd toward the exit of the saloon. Don Warren, leaving his glass of poolkay untouched, followed them.

Yes, he had been right as to the identity of the guttural voice which he had overheard. There could be no mistaking the gross waddling body, the bullet head and bull neck, of the swarthy Colonel Ak-Ak. Furthermore, he wore the uniform of an officer of the Martian army. His companion was slim and boyish, yet with broad shoulders and sturdy stride. Curly hair of the same burnished gold as Esta's. He was clad in civilian breeches and tunic of steel gray, rather than in the flowing white or striped cape of a tribesman, as Warren had expected. Warren did not get a view of the young Mauro's face.

Just outside the saloon, in the garish glare of the street floodlights, Colonel Ak-Ak and the supposed Ben-Stu halted. Warren ducked behind one of the pillars of the doorway. The two conspirators shook hands and parted,

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the Colonel going to the left and the other to the right.

Warren once more hesitated for a moment, debating whether he should warn his ex-superior. Then he shrugged his broad shoulders, and followed the young Ben-Stu. It was now the supper-hour; the brightly lighted street of the space-port city was practically deserted. The long metallic cigarette-holder, still in Warren's hand, gave him an idea. He stepped rapidly forward and jabbed it suddenly into the ribs of his quarry.

"Not a move or a word, or I'll blast you!" he hissed.

The other winced, but made no attempt at a get-away.

Warren continued peremptorily, "Step into this next saloon, and no funny-business. I want a word with you." He withdrew his supposed atomic pistol, and held it so that it bulged out the folds of his tunic. The other glanced around, saw the bulge, and shrugged again. They entered the next saloon.

Warren found an empty booth, and with his left hand motioned the young Mauro inside. They sat down facing each other, Warren's gun-hand beneath the table. For a few moments the two appraised each other in silence.

Warren liked what he saw. The Mauro's face was handsome, almost beautiful, and yet not in the least effeminate. His eyes were crinkly and a deep azure blue, almost the color of Esta's. His nose was short and straight, with just the least tilt to one side. His mouth was quizzical, and yet with a certain aloofness. His chin was firm.

"Have a drink?" Warren invited.

"Thank you, no. I don't drink—with strangers."

"We can't sit here unless we order. Better join me. Here, waiter, two seltzers."

"Well?" the Mauro inquired, raising one furry dark eyebrow. "Of whom do I have the honor to be a captive?"

"I belong to the Martian secret service," Warren lied.

"So?" The Mauro did not seem in the least disturbed. If anything, he seemed relieved, slightly.

"My name is Don Warren. Ever hear it?" Esta certainly had mentioned Warren in her household. The people of Daloss must have heard the name of the only outsider ever to evade their clutches, especially inasmuch as their own Princess had aided in his escape.

BUT there was not the flicker of recognition in the cool blue eyes of the man opposite. He shook his head. "No—. And my name is my own business," he added.

"I stole your white slith three years ago," Warren continued, watching like a cat.

The other shrugged. "So you know who I am? Or, rather, who you *think* I am."

"I heard Colonel Ak-Ak address you as Ben-Stu."

The other grinned broadly, but said nothing.

The waiter arrived with the sodas. Warren paid him, and he withdrew. "Ben-Stu," said Warren. "I wish word of your sister, Esta."

The Mauro raised his heavy eyebrows, pursed his lips, and chuckled irritatingly. "Assuming that I *am* Ben-Stu," he said, "I answer that she is well."

"And Ab-Nadik?" This was the young Mauro officer to whom Esta had been betrothed before Warren had come into her life.

"You seem to know all the family."

"Family?" Warren sat suddenly erect, his face an agony of apprehen-

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sion. "They, they are—"

"Married? Alas, no. For Esta kept postponing the ceremony. But recently the brave Lieutenant was wounded—seriously wounded in a raid. That doesn't displease you, does it? I thought not." Ben-Stu was now doing the cat-watching. "Esta has been nursing him back to health. The ceremony will take place as soon as he recovers."

"And how soon will that be?"

"About two passings of the slower moon."

Don Warren settled back with a sigh of relief. "There is yet time," he breathed.

A hand beneath the table suddenly gripped the wrist of Warren's weapon hand. The next instant he was jerked forward against the flimsy table. The Earthman, caught off guard by the sudden assault, fought first for balance, at the same time striving to jerk his right hand free from Ben-Stu's grip.

In that he erred, for immediately the Mauro's brawny left fist drove across the short expanse of table, and caught Warren flush on the point of the chin. A sick weak trembling ran through Warren from the shock, and his ears began to ring. Instinctively he clung to Ben-Stu's wrist under the table, locking the Mauro's right arm, and at the same time trying to shake the cobwebs from his reeling brain.

Ben-Stu, snarling fiercely, tried to get his right arm loose. Failing, he yanked Warren toward him. The Earthman's weight was thrown heavily against the table, upsetting it. The table tipped out of the booth. Ben-Stu rolled free. But Warren, clawing wildly for support, grasped nothing but air and came down with his belly smack against the upturned table edge.

He felt consciousness recede, but managed to slide off onto the floor, and then stagger to his feet. He opened his eyes to see at least three weaving bobbing Ben-Stu's attack him, and his arms went up in defense.

Ben-Stu's fist, crashing against Warren's head, rocked him out of his daze. His strength returned. Gritting his teeth, he closed in and exchanged hard punishing body-blows with the young Mauro.

By this time a crowd had gathered and were wildly cheering the two combatants. Warren paid no attention to them. He sent a blow to Ben-Stu's mouth that brought blood trickling over the firm young chin. The angered Mauro waded in fiercely, caught the giddy Warren under the heart and made him sag. Then a smashing fist into the jaw, and Warren slid to the floor.

FLAT on his back lay Don Warren, in the midst of a circle of thrilled spectators. His wiry opponent knelt astride of him, one hand on Warren's throat, the other gripping the supposed barrel of the supposed ray-gun. With a wrench, he snatched it away, and held it up in triumph. Then he grimaced at the anticlimax of finding that it was not the weapon he had supposed.

But he quickly covered-up his chagrin by shouting, "So you would try to steal my cigarette-holder? Let this teach you a lesson."

He gave the prostrate Earthman a slap on the face, and rose to his feet. Furious, humiliated, Warren too got up. Both men brushed themselves off, and smoothed their rumpled tunics. Disappointed, the audience dispersed.

Ben-Stu clapped his hands peremptorily. "Waiter, put back the table, and bring two poolkays." Then to Warren, "As I said before, I do not drink with *strangers*."

The two young men reseated them-

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selves in their boot.

Ben-Stu, pocketing the cigarette-holder, said, "I shall keep this as a memento of a very pleasant evening."

The drinks arrived. The Mauro paid the waiter. Then he leaned forward across the table, toying with the stem of his goblet with one slim virile hand, and inquired. "And what proof have you that you are the man who stole my slith?"

"This," Warren replied, a little angrily. He groped in his pocket, and produced the ancient gold coin, filched from the treasure-room of Daloss.

His companion studied it intently, turning it over and over. Then shook his head. "No go," he said, as he handed it back. "I never saw one like it. And now that you do not know whether or not I am the son of Mu-Lai, the bandit, and I do not know whether or not *you* are Don Warren, what next?"

"Why are you in Andeldug?" Warren snapped, with a suddenness well calculated to catch the other off his guard.

The Mauro shrugged his lithe shoulders. "A fair question. I *might* be about to take a brief trip to the Earth. After all, Andeldug *is* a space-sport, you know. What else would a fellow be doing here?"

"Have you yet bought your ticket?"

"No. Why?"

"Would you be interested in getting one at half price?"

"Possibly."

"Sold!" Warren exclaimed, pulling out his ticket and handing it over.

Ben-Stu withdrew a fat wallet from the folds of his tunic, and counted out several rectangular gold-pieces. "You ought to have robbed me, instead of questioning me. It would have been much more productive. Well, give my regards to my *sister*." He put a peculiar emphasis on the last word.

Thrusting the wallet and the ticket into a pocket of his tunic, he arose and held out his slender sinewy hand. "Till we meet again." Grinning quizzically, he left the booth.

Don Warren stared after him, until he was lost in the crowd. Then gulping down both poolkays, the Earthman departed for a decent night's lodging.

THE next morning Warren purchased a fine grey slith, a saddle and bridle, saddle bags, two atomic pistols, and all the ammunition and compressed food the beast could carry. Then he ferried down the Great Canal to Ricca, from which point he set out on slithback across the burning sands toward the distant Fobian Range—and what lay beyond.

But just as he was riding out of the city gates of Ricca onto the broad red plain, a tall figure shrouded in a white desert-cape stepped before him, and held up one hand. Warren reined-in his slith.

"What are *you* doing here, Ben-Stu?" he exclaimed. "I thought you were bound for Earth."

"That can wait," the young Mauro replied, striding up alongside the slith. Then he glanced furtively around, and whispered, "How would you like safe-conduct to the city of my father."

Warren's pulse leaped at the prospect. But, inherently cautious, he countered with, "At what price?"

"Your caution does you credit. The price is to work with Colonel Ak-Ak and me."

"At what?"

"Oh, I thought you had overheard us when you were skulking in the next booth to us, last night. We plan to overthrow my father, and make me King of Daloss."

Warren drew in his breath sharply.

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He had never expected this! Blinded by the resemblance of this young Martian to his reputed sister, Warren had instinctively assumed that whatever Mauro treachery might lurk in Ben-Stu's make-up would be directed against the enemies of his city, not against his own kin. And yet why not? Esta had been willing to betray her father for love of Don Warren; so why should not Ben-Stu betray his father for love of his own self?

Warren hastily suppressed a growing look of horror and contempt, and smiled enigmatically. Ben-Stu watched him craftily, intently.

"Surprised, eh?" asked the Mauro.

"N-no." Warren pursed his lips ruminatively. "Merely wondering."

"Wondering what?"

"What the Martian government expects to get out of the deal?"

"If you were the secret-service agent you pretended to be last evening, you'd know."

"Completely exposed, aren't I?" Warren dissembled a light laugh. "Well, I might as well come clean with you, as I expect you to come clean with me. I was sentenced to three years in the penal battalion and then drummed out of the Interplanetary Legion for that little escapade of attacking your impregnable city three years ago. The government of Mars was responsible both for the failure of our expedition and for my being punished for that failure. So why should I help them to make a success of a second attack?"

WARREN had been very careful not to express any hostility to Colonel Ak-Ak, though it had been Ak-Ak, rather than the government of Mars, who had been responsible for both the failure of the expedition and Warren's penal servitude. Warren was banking on Ben-Stu not knowing the background of the previous adventure.

Ben-Stu now replied, "Right enough. Why should you, any more than I, assist that government?" His blue eyes glinted like blue steel. "Know then that Ak-Ak is a traitor to that government which you hate. He and I plan to rule Daloss together. Then to Erlik with the red rulers of Mars!"

This was worse and more of it! Tempted though Warren was to dissemble further, and thus obtain the coveted pass which would ensure him safe entry to the city which held his beloved, his contempt at her treacherous brother and his realization of what the rule of the gross Colonel Ak-Ak might mean to her people, overcame all sense of discretion.

With a shout of "For Mu-Lai and Esta," he wheeled his slith toward the young man who stood unsuspectingly beside him, and drove his spurs into the beast's grey reptilian sides to ride Ben-Stu down.

Although taken with surprise, Ben-Stu with native quickness leaped aside. The slith's shoulder struck him a glancing blow, but the wiry Mauro wheeled and flung himself at Warren.

His clawing fingers clutched Warren's waist and fastened tightly in his garments. Warren was yanked from his mount by the forward motion of the charging slith, and flopped heavily to the ground, with the cursing clawing Ben-Stu atop him.

But this time Warren didn't have the breath knocked from him, nor was he off balance as he had been in the cafe. He sprang to his feet, as Ben-Stu, head down and fists flailing, came tearing in. In the heat of battle both men forgot their atomic pistols. This was a grudge fight—man against man.

Warren planted his feet in the deep red sand and shot out a speeding right fist. It caught Ben-Stu flush in the

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neck—brought him straight upright. Again Warren's fist streaked for the other's jaw, and Ben-Stu tripped back into the sand.

The Earthman leaped forward in an attempt to fling himself upon his rival, but Ben-Stu craftily dove for Warren's feet, clamped them in his grip and jerked Warren to the ground. Like a wild beast he crawled upward to get at Warren's throat. The Earthman nimbly twisted aside and to his knees.

Once more they were on their feet. Again they charged at each other, Ben-Stu reckless, and Warren cagily making sure of his footing before he struck. As Ben-Stu came charging in for the third time, Warren let him have a right across to the chin. This time Ben-Stu crumpled to the sands, and before he could get up Warren was atop him.

Ben-Stu kicked furiously and tried to twist aside, but the triumphant Earthman was not to be denied. His hands found his victim's pulsing throat, his own neck craned and averted just out of reach of the frantically flailing fists of Ben-Stu.

The Mauro's untamed blue eyes stared upward with a searching appeal. His lips moved as if to voice some plea, but Warren's strong fingers clamped tighter, and no sound came. Ben-Stu's complexion turned a mottled purple. His eyeballs protruded.

Warren snarled, "This will put an end to your treason! Esta's brother a traitor! Bah!"

BUT after all Esta loved her brother —traitor or no traitor. There could be no doubt of that. Warren's thoughts flashed back to the time when, as he lay on the cobblestones of the City of Lost Souls stunned by a fall from his slith, the report of the death of this brother had galvanized the golden-haired Esta into a fit of beserk rage against all the wounded Legionnaires.

With a sigh and a grimace of disgust, Don Warren relaxed his strangling grip on Ben-Stu's throat, and rose wearily.

Ben-Stu's own hands now clutched at his own throat. His chest strained mightily, until at last a tortured raucous gasp came through his swollen lips. His popping eyeballs receded. The mottled purple fled from his cheeks. He sat up, shook himself, and grinned.

He cleared his throat a few times. "Well," he coughed, "that makes us quits for the licking I gave you in the tavern last night. Do you wish the cigaret-holder back, or may I still keep it as a souvenir?"

"Cut the comedy!" Warren rasped, still standing menacingly over him, with both fists clenched. "I ought to have killed you for the traitor that you are."

"So? And give up getting the free pass into Daloss, which I offered you?"

"I'm not thinking of myself. I'm thinking of Esta. And," a bit ruefully, "it was only because you are—or claim to be—her brother, that I finally spared your life."

"Thanks to little sister for that much." Ben-Stu blew an airy kiss to the vast expanse of red desert which lay around them. Then sobering, "Now listen, you impetuous fool! If you hadn't had such an infernally tight grip on my windpipe, I'd have been able to save my own life by a simple explanation. I have no intent whatever of betraying my people or my father. Colonel Ak-Ak is a scoundrel. Anyone who follows him in this venture is a traitor to Mars, and deserves no sympathy. I have entered into this pretended conspiracy with Ak-Ak for one purpose only—to find out whom of my own people can be trusted."

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"And, on the side, to entrap and destroy a large government force?"

"You show remarkable discernment for one so dumb."

Warren grimaced. Ben-Stu grinned, and struggled to his feet. The two young men faced each other, sizing each other up.

Then Warren held out his hand. "I'm with you," he declared.

"Good!" Ben-Stu gripped the extended hand. Then he took a card and a stylus from some pocket beneath his flowing white cape, and scribbled a note on it. "This will get you through Ak-Ak's lines, to Daloss. Give my regards to my sister."

Warren had no difficulty in rounding up his slith, which was browsing peacefully on a clump of red desert moss about a hundred yards away.

Then, waving to Ben-Stu, he galloped off toward the dim green slopes of the Fobian Mountains on the distant horizon. Other days long distant he had ridden the same terrain, accompanied by hellbent Legionnaires, lured by the treasure of Daloss. This time he rode alone. Would there be a return?

THE more that Warren thought about the situation, the less certain he felt. With so much intrigue afoot, just who was double-crossing whom?

Was Ben-Stu really Esta's supposedly dead brother? Was Ben-Stu deceiving Colonel Ak-Ak; or was he, after all, a traitor to his own father? What was the real nature of the conspiracy between these two plotters? And had the young Mauro told the truth about Esta and Ab-Nadik?

Along toward afternoon, Warren noticed a black line of men on sliths approaching in the distance, far to the left. For a moment he watched them. Were they friends or foes? Better not to take a chance on meeting them now.

Warren jabbed his spurs into the slith, and the lean reptile leaped forward. But the Earthman had gone only a short distance when he observed that the cavalcade had apparently spotted him. The black line veered sharply toward him, splitting into two parts.

"Now I am in for trouble," growled Warren to himself. " But perhaps I can circle that large dune ahead, and elude them."

He made good speed to the dune, and spurred up its side, with one of the two detachments of slithmen in close pursuit.

As he gained its crest, he looked ahead to find that the other detachment were charging up the slope on that side. He was trapped between two fires, one from ahead, the other from the rear. Furthermore he could now make out that these were government troops.

Off to one side was a cleft in the dune. Instantly Warren's plans were made.

Sitting on his mount at the extreme crest of the dune, he discharged an atomic blast at each of the enemy groups in succession. Then shouted, so that both could hear, "Come on, men, charge! We've got them cornered. I ride to join you."

Of course, he did not ride to join either detachment of the enemy. Instead he wheeled his mount, and slunk off down the declivity to one side, while the two detachments of the enemy met with a hail of fire, at the top of the ridge, each group imagining the other to be henchmen of Warren.

The defile into which Warren had dropped, was a twisted one, and so he was concealed from the battling forces. But he made the mistake of spurring out onto the plain and trying to escape. Instantly the government cavalrymen spotted him. One cried "There goes our man!"

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Warren whirled in his saddle. His atomic pistols spat death at his pursuers.

Their returning fire blasted his slith. The animal went down, flinging Warren headlong. He had just time to crawl behind a large red sandstone boulder when his pursuers reached the spot. Atomic blasts flamed against the rock, splintering it and tearing big holes in the sand nearby.

The Earthman blazed away at his enemies until his guns would perform no more. His last charge of atomic force gone, Warren flung down his useless weapons, and held his arms aloft as a token of surrender.

"Well, now that you bandits have captured me," he shouted, "what do you propose to do with me?"

THERE was a moment of silence. Then a sergeant motioned to two privates to bind the captive. Warily they approached, for Don Warren had taken a heavy toll of their comrades, and so they still held him in great respect, although now apparently unarmed.

"What do you mean 'bandits'?" the sergeant exclaimed. "We are government troops."

"No?" Warren ejaculated, raising his eyebrows in well-feigned surprise. "Thank God! I thought you were Mauros. Why didn't you say who you were, in the first place? It would have saved me a nasty scare, and would have spared you the loss of half your detachment. Well, no one can blame me for resisting capture by what I thought to be tribesmen."

"How can you prove you didn't know our identity?" the sergeant truculently replied. Yet there was an undercurrent of uncertainty in his tones.

Warren chuckled to himself. "My papers are in perfect shape, and I am not wanted by the authorities. I have a license to prospect in the desert. And surely no tribunal would believe that I was so foolhardy as to attack a whole platoon of regulars." He shrugged his broad shoulders, as though perfectly at ease.

The sergeant too shrugged. "Well, come along and tell your story to Colonel Ak-Ak."

Warren with difficulty suppressed the gleam of joy which flared into his eyes. He had not dared hope that these forces against whom he had been fighting were those allied with Ben-Stu. Rather had he feared that they were some other detachment of government troops who would enforce the law against trading with the City of Lost Souls. Wouldn't Ak-Ak be surprised to see him, Ak-Ak's old enemy and especially under safe conduct from Ak-Ak's co-conspirator, Ben-Stu!

More cavalrymen than sliths had been slain in the battle, and so there was a vacant mount available for the captive. The smooth gait of the animal made riding not unpleasant, even with bound hands.

Early in the cool green desert evening, the detachment galloped into a tented encampment, clustering around a small red-stone house. Here Warren was immediately ushered into the presence of Colonel Ak-Ak.

Not a flicker of recognition did the gross red Martian aristocrat give to the prisoner.

The sergeant gave a surprisingly truthful account of the battle, of course omitting the part where each section of his own command had mistaken the other section for the enemy. He claimed that, on Warren's first approach, he had identified himself and his men as government troops; but magnanimously admitted that Warren may have misunderstood or may not have heard.

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In return for this sporting treatment, Warren confirmed the sergeant's story, adding merely that he had mistaken the troops for Mauro bandits, and had promptly surrendered as soon as he realized the identity of the attackers.

WHEN Warren concluded his narration, Colonel Ak-Ak with a wave of his pudgy copper-hued hand, ordered the sergeant and the guards to withdraw.

"But, Colonel," the sergeant remonstrated, "the prisoner is a dangerous and desperate character."

"Do you insinuate," Ak-Ak snarled, "that I, an aristocrat of Mars, am not capable of handling this Earth-scum? Be gone!"

Sheepishly they withdrew.

When they had closed the door behind them, Ak-Ak's face broke into a narrow-eyed smile.

"Well, Sergeant Warren," he bellowed, "for you once *were* a sergeant under me—or have you forgotten?—what brings you here?"

"You saw what brought me here, a squad of your own soldiers," Warren boldly replied. "But, if I had deigned to show them *this,* they would have brought me in honor, rather than as a prisoner."

He thrust his hand into one of the pockets of his tunic. Then his face fell. Hastily he searched through all his pockets, one by one, over and over.

The safe-conduct pass given him by Ben-Stu was nowhere to be found!

"A BLUFF, eh?" the Martian Colonel growled. "Well, now at last you are in my hands, and what should have been done three years ago can now be completed. I ought to have had you shot for your foolhardy part in leading three thousand of the best troops of the Interplanetary Legion to a useless death in the City of Lost Souls."

"If you had helped us, instead of hindered us, the assault on that city would *not* have been useless," Warren boldly replied.

"Enough of this insolence!" Ak-Ak barked, pounding on his desk with one hamlike fist. "I now have it in my power to condemn you to death, for attacking government troops. But perhaps you would care to buy your life."

"With what?"

Colonel Ak-Ak's pig eyes glittered. "With information. If you answer me truthfully, I will not only spare you—I might even offer you back your old rank of Sergeant. For you are a brave fighter, and *I* need such men."

"You—or Mars?"

Ak-Ak gripped the edges of his desk, and the pig eyes in his swarthy face became slits. "What do you mean?"

"Merely that I am an ally and a friend of your friend and ally, Ben-Stu of Daloss."

"Ben-Stu and I are allies yes," the Martian Colonel muttered, half to himself, "but friends, no. Allies of convenience and necessity; but I mistrust Ben-Stu—and his friends. No need to question you any further. You know too much. You will, my dear Sergeant—*ex*-Sergeant rather—have to stand trial for your treasonable assault on my outpost."

"Isn't that rather foolish of you, Colonel? What if I were to testify that I know of *your* treasonable plan to use government troops to place yourself on the throne of Daloss? Colonel Ak-Ak, it is now *my* turn to dicker. The price of my silence is my freedom. Let me have a slith, provide me with a new supply of desert rations, and I give you my word of honor that I will open the gates of Daloss for you."

Colonel Ak-Ak grinned ingratiating-

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ly. "Young man, you win. I was just testing you. You are free to leave. I'll write you a pass." He pulled open the top right-hand drawer of the desk, and took out a pad of blank-forms, emblazoned with the coat-of-arms of Mars.

BUT there was an evil glint in his little pig eyes, which he could not conceal. And following the line of sight of Ak-Ak's glance, Warren saw that it rested on the butt-end of an atomic pistol, lying in the open drawer from which the Colonel had taken the pad of forms.

"So?" said Warren to himself. "Very clever of the old buzzard! The 'ley fugo,' a quaint Old Spanish custom. I'm to be permitted to leave, and then will be shot in the back as I do so. Ak-Ak will retrieve the pass which he gives me, and the coroner's verdict will be: 'Shot while attempting to escape.' Very neat!"

Aloud he said, "It is very gracious of you, Colonel. One who trusts me, is never sorry. But would you mind telling me what you are writing on the pass—for, alas, I cannot read Martian."

Ak-Ak made a gesture of pretended annoyance, but a crafty smile spread over his gross jowls. "There, you've made me spoil it, with your chatter." He ripped off the top sheet of the pad, and tore it up. Then, as he resumed writing, he read aloud: "Furnish Donald Warren with a slith, arms, and desert rations, and pass him through my lines. Ak-Ak, Colonel, Imperial Martian Army."

He ripped off the sheet and handed it to Warren. And once more his glance rested on the butt of the atomic pistol in the open upper right-hand drawer of his desk.

Warren took the pass, folded it without reading it, and stuffed it into one of the pockets of his tunic. Clicking his heels together, he saluted smartly. Colonel Ak-Ak lumbered to his feet, and returned the salute, stepping around the corner of the desk and letting his left hand rest casually on the edge of the open drawer.

Warren held out his hand. "Goodbye, sir, and thank you."

Smiling craftily, Ak-Ak instinctively held out his own right hand, to accept the proferred handshake.

Slowly, without a flicker of the eye to indicate his intent, Warren clasped the extended hand. Then suddenly he yanked the Colonel toward him, off balance and away from that open drawer. Warren's left fist shot out straight to Ak-Ak's jaw, and the gross Martian Colonel crumpled and sagged to the floor without a sound.

Warren bent down. Working at high speed, he ripped the Colonel's tunic into shreds, and gagged his mouth and bound his wrists and ankles with the pieces.

Next to read the alleged pass. Inexpert as Warren was with the written pictographs of Mars, he was able to make out that the paper directed his arrest on sight. But the torn paper lying on the floor, the one which Ak-Ak had prepared before Warren had stated his inability to read Martian—that one was in truth phrased correctly.

Hurriedly Warren transcribed its hieroglyphs onto a fresh sheet, and forged the Colonel's signature at the bottom. Then pocketing the Colonel's weapon, he stepped out of the little stone house, closing the door behind him.

TO THE burly guard outside he reported, "The Colonel asks not to be disturbed for an hour by—anyone. He has some important paperwork to do."

Before the stupid guard had time to digest that information, Warren was

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striding toward the picket-line. There he flashed his pass to the officer in charge, and picked out what seemed to be the fastest slith tethered there. At the commissary, rations, weapons and ammunition were forthcoming. Everywhere the forged pass worked magic.

Warren glanced back at the Headquarters building—all was quiet there, with the sentinel still pacing up and down outside. So Warren led his laden mount to the edge of the camp.

But here an uexpected difficulty presented itself. A lanky sentinel studied Warren's pass. "I can see the seal of Mars, all right, but I can't make out all these lizard-tracks."

Warren read the pass aloud, but still the sentinel shook his head. "I'll have to call the Corporal of the Guard, though I doubt if *he* knows how to read either."

Interminable delay presented itself. The Corporal would escort him to the guard-house, so the the Officer of the Guard could inspect the pass. By that time almost anything might have happened.

In fact, it was happening right now. As Warren looked back toward the camp, the door of headquarters swung open, and Colonel Ak-Ak, still gagged and trussed-up rolled out. There was no time to lose.

"But I am Sergeant Donald Warren, you numbskull!" Warren explained. "It will go hard with you, if you do not honor this pass. I am on an important mission of reconnaissance, and must leave immediately!"

"Sorry, Sir, but I never saw you before."

"Nor have I ever seen you! That makes it unanimous."

The sentry scratched his head. While he was dumbly trying to figure that one out, Warren vaulted into the saddle, and was off across the red desert at a full gallop. The befuddled sentry shrugged his shoulders, and let him go.

However, by this time Colonel Ak-Ak was on his feet, unbound and ungagged, shouting orders. Soon a mounted detail was in hot pursuit of the fugitive. Now indeed the "ley fugo" could be put into effect; and, if successful, there need be no *pretense* that Warren was "attempting to escape."

But first they would have to catch him. Warren had chosen well, in selecting his slith from the picket line, for this noble saurian was indeed fleet-footed and in the prime of condition.

ONE factor more was in Warren's favor. The greenish shadows of the Martian night were deepening. If the speed of his slith held up, he might escape his pursuers in the gathering dusk. So he bent forward on his mount, crooning words of sweet encouragement, mixed with searing oaths, into its ears in an effort to coax even more speed out of the animal.

But his pursuers had evidently trailed fugitives countless times before. Their strategy was to send their fleetest mounted sliths ahead, and to follow with other fresh unmounted sliths strung out behind led by other riders. In this manner, when sliths bearing riders tired from the weight they carried, fresh sliths could be substituted with very little delay.

Warren, blasting away at his pursuers, was astonished at the way in which the distance between him and his enemies was being slowly cut down, in spite of the speed of his own slith. He could not understand how at one moment he seemed to be leaving them behind only to have the gap narrow quickly the next.

The rolling red desert did not have enough rock formations to enable Warren to circle or sidetrack his pursuers. He saw that he would have to wait for

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that until he reached the Fobian Mountains now almost directly ahead of him.

The slith's speed was slowing down by the time the Earthman reached the mountain slopes. Night was now falling fast beneath the twin moons of Mars. Warren guided his roaring mount into a deep narrow canyon, momentarily eluding the posse.

From this point he was able to climb higher into the mountains, and his heart began to sing as he thought he was giving his pursuers the slip.

His joy was shortlived, however. Gazing down into the valley, he noticed tiny twinklings of flashlights as the posse followed the splay footprints of his slith. Well, anyway, that procedure would slow them up. They'd never catch him now.

But wait! Where was he? Warren had been going up and up, and now found himself on a narrow rock ledge with a precipice on one side and a towering cliff on the other. A natural mountain trap that he had unwittingly gotten into.

He could of course go back. But that would be folly! He was outnumbered at least twenty to one. He turned his slith about. The animal bumped against something, and its fore part went down heavily. Warren jumped just in time to avoid being crushed by the animal.

He felt its leg. Broken!

For a moment he stood undecided. Already he could hear the shouts of his pursuers not far distant. He drew his atomic pistol, fired, and the steed lay limp.

"Too bad, old fellow," said Warren sadly. "You served me well."

QUICKLY he stuffed compressed rations into his mouth, shoved the pistols into his pocket with as many refills as he could carry. Then he pushed the carcass of the dead slith to the precipice and sent it toppling over.

The voices of his pursuers were closer now. Wearily, Warren began climbing the steep cliff to his right. It was his only chance! There was no retreat.

The cliff was terrifically steep. Warren's hands were stiff and bleeding. Several times he almost lost his footing, and experienced a sensation of dizziness as he thought of the drop into the abyss below. But he kept on, sheer will power driving his muscles to greater exertion. Finally, he pulled himself over the top and lay in a depression, panting, resting his aching body.

He heard voices below, but did not dare to look. Well, if they climbed up after him, he would shoot it out with them to the end.

"See! Here is blood," said someone.

Boots scraped on hard rock.

"The slith fell, cut its leg, and they both rolled over the edge," said another. "Well, our chase is ended. The fellow is dead."

Warren heard them leave, but he was too tired to peer over the rock. Batlike reptiles flew about him, brushing him with their wings. He did not even move to shoo them away, and shortly fell into a deep sleep.

In the chill morning he awoke cold and hungry. The eminence on which he lay sloped gently down away from the top of the cliff which he had scaled. Warren rubbed his eyes and peered into the distance on all sides. Westward he could barely discern the outlines of Colonel Ak-Ak's camp. So he set out north-east, in the general direction of Daloss—and Esta.

He found a few pieces of compressed rations in his pockets. But these morsels made his hunger worse. His throat was dry as paper. If only he reached his destination before hunger and thirst finished him.

For hours he wandered down the

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mountain slopes out into red desert, footsore and discouraged. Every step became an effort. His throat burned constantly.

By evening he was plodding along ready to drop at every step from exhaustion. He had found nothing to eat or drink. His bloodshot eyes stared like those of a man whose mind had fled. Just when he sank to the ground and fell asleep, he never remembered.

WHEN morning came, he was unable to rise. He was weak and shaken and his throat felt as if iron bands were closing it. Somehow he finally got up and stumbled forward on his cut and bloody feet. Would his quest end here? Would he die before he reached the City of Lost Souls?

The red sands were blistering his sore feet, reddening his eyes, and stiffening his eyelashes.

His bleary gaze fastened on the space before him. In the distance he could see men on sliths approaching from several directions. They seemed to be Mauros—clad in white robes. Should he shoot it out with them?

His hands felt for the atomic pistols. They were gone, apparently lost in his wanderings. Fool! Why had he not strapped them to him?

He glanced about, found a craterlike declivity in the red sands and lay down. Perhaps they wouldn't find him there. If they did, they would probably shoot him on sight. If they didn't find him, he would probably die anyway.

THE Mauros trotted closer and met about a hundred meters distant from Warren's hiding place. They exchanged greetings and dismounted. In the clear desert air Warren could hear every word. He learned that they were patrols, scouting against the reported advance of government troops, of which, however, they had seen none.

It had been hot and stuffy enough in this hole when Warren had crawled into it, exhausted, famished, and perishing of thirst. But, as the glaring sun mounted in the cloudless desert sky, the heat became unbearable. Sweat oozed from every pore of a body already dehydrated to the limit. And yet this sweat brought no cooling relief, so swiftly was its moisture sucked up by the furnace-hot dry desert atmosphere.

Warren lay prone on the burning sands, face-down to shield his eyes from the blazing glare of the noonday sun. But at last he could no longer stand the heat of the sun's rays upon his back, and rolled over, face upwards, covering his eyes with his blistered hands.

"Dear God, don't let me die like this!" he prayed. "Erlik, black deity of my Esta, I'll even put in a word to thee. Let me see my beloved once more, and I'll burn incense even on thy golden altar."

He laughed harshly, as his reeling mind recalled the story of the old Irish lady who used to bend the knee, not only whenever the priest mentioned the name of one of the blessed Trinity, but even when he mentioned the devil. The priest, noticing this, remonstrated with her; but she replied, "Now, feyther a little politeness never hurt noone; and who can tell what may happen?"

The voices of the Mauro scouts droned on interminably.

Shading his eyes Warren stared up into the limitless expanse of black sky, and discerned a faint sun-tinged speck of silver-gray, circling about. The speck descended in ever widening circles, growing larger and larger, until Warren could make out the shape of a bat-desert buzzard, settling toward him.

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The Mauros too noticed it.

"Here comes the angel of death," one declared. "May Erlik, the black god, preserve us!"

"Wonder what the foul beast sees," spoke another. "Doubtless something in that hollow over there."

"Oh, some carcass, likely," shrugged a third. "So long as *we* still live, why worry!"

WITH a croak, the huge pterodactyl settled onto the red sands a few meters away from the prostrate Earthman, flexed and unflexed its leathery wings a few times, then folded them with a clatter, and hopped over to him, craning its wrinkled neck, and cocking its ungainly head on one side, to stare at him out of beady black eyes. An overpowering reptilian stench filled the little crater.

Warren retched, and the bat-buzzard recoiled a few hops in surprise.

Warren kicked one foot at the beast in the hope of shooing it away; but this gesture only excited its curiosity. It hopped closer. The man tried to spit at it, but no saliva came into his parched mouth.

Raising himself painfully upon his left elbow, he scratched in the sand with his right hand, found a small red stone, and heaved it at the creature. The stone was a direct hit. With a squawk of surprise, the bat-lizard flapped aloft for a few wing-strokes; then settled down again and furled its leathery wings.

"Something queer going on over in that hollow!" one of the Mauros exclaimed. "Let's investigate."

A loud scornful laugh greeted his suggestion, and he subsided.

As for Warren, he collapsed weakly, totally enervated by his effort. The desert reeled and swam about him. He was almost past caring what happened.

A sharp painful blow on his chest aroused him. He opened his eyes. The leathery buzzard was perched upon him, tentatively pecking at him with its beak. The fetid stench of its nearness was overpowering; but Warren's thirst was so intense that at that instant he could have gulped down sewage with relish. This creature, gaunt though it was, must have blood in its veins: stinking blood, but blood, a liquid!

Quickly swinging up both hands across his body, Warren clutched the neck of his tormenter, and squeezed. Squeezed so quickly that no squawk, nor even a hiss, came from the beast. Its eyes bulged out. Its beak opened and closed spasmodically. It beat at him with its leather wings, and clawed at him with its knifelike talons. But still he held on, and squeezed all the tighter, with a desperation born of desert madness.

FINALLY the beast went limp, and its reptilian writhings ceased. Avidly Warren pulled its long wrinkled neck down toward his face, withdrew cracked and swollen lips from his teeth, and sought for the jugular vein of his victim.

All thought of his surroundings had fled from his heat-crazed mind. He knew but one idea—liquid to slake his parched palate.

A laugh above him snapped him back to the realities of his situation. Flinging the dead reptile from him, he staggered to his feet, and groped for the atomic pistol which he did not have.

The whole rim of the hollow was lined with Mauros, fierce dark-visaged hawk-nosed Mauros in flowing white capes.

"We have you covered," spoke one. "Better come peaceably."

Tiredly, with a great effort, Warren raised his arms above his head. Then his knees buckled, and he pitched for-

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ward on his face on the hot sands.

After interminable eras he opened his eyes aagin. His head lay in the lap of a Mauro warrior, whose not unkindly visage was peering down at him.

"Water!" he croaked.

The mouth of a canteen was inserted between his lips, and a warm trickle entered his gullet. With a sigh, Warren passed out again.

Vague recollections of jolting along, slung face down across the withers of a slith. Then twilight, cool green evening shadows, and the tents and fires of a Mauro encampment. Once more oblivion, broken only by a dream—or was it a dream?—of hot and savory broth.

WHEN Warren next opened his eyes, it was to the calm awakening from a refreshing sleep. Sweltering noonday once more. He was lying on a bed of mats and skins in a small striped tent. Just outside the opening, squatted a burly Mauro sentinel grasping a long atomic rifle in one black hand. Warren hailed him. The guard parted the tent-flaps, and stepped inside.

"How you feel?" he asked.

Warren grinned. "Better. How does it happen that you fellows treated me so kindly? I thought that desert tribesmen always killed their captives. Tortured them, even."

The Mauro bared his white teeth in a mirthless grin as he replied, "Our chief says to be very good to prisoners, so that he can ask them questions."

"And then?"

"After that we torture them." His dark eyes gleamed expectantly, and he bared his teeth again.

"Pleasant prospect. And who *is* your chief?"

"Ben-Stu."

Warren gasped with relief. "Not really?" he eagerly exclaimed. But Ben-Stu had been headed for a space-trip to the Earth. He couldn't be here! It was too good to be true!

The Mauro shrugged. "He here all right."

"Then send for him! At once! Please! He's a friend of mine. Tell him that you have captured his friend, Don Warren."

The Mauro shrugged again, ducked out between the tent flaps, and called to another tribesman who happened to be swishing by in his white cape. The two whispered together for a moment, with occasional glances toward the man inside the tent. Then the other strode away, and the burly sentinel squatted down again and resumed his watch.

After a long wait, a squad arrived, and escorted Warren to headquarters, a rather palatial marquee for such desert forces. Warren half expected to find that Ben-Stu was not there, after all; and so he was not surprised nor very disappointed, when he was led into the presence of a typical hawk-nosed gun-metal-black desert chieftain.

The man reclined in a sort of elaborate folding camp-chair.

"Name?" he snapped, surveying Warren coldly from beneath long black lashes.

"Donald Warren, Earthman, lately Sergeant of the Imperial Martian Army."

"Any proof of your identity?"

"Yes." Warren fished in the pockets of his torn blouse, found the forged pass, somewhat matted and blotted by sweat, and handed it over.

The Mauro chieftain gingerly unfolded it, deciphered the name and the signature, reading them both haltingly aloud, then grinned engagingly and motioned to another reclining chair near his. Warren slumped gratefully into it, for he was still very weak.

The Mauro turned to one of the guards. "Tell him it's he," was the

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cryptic message which he gave. Then to Warren, "Well, Sergeant, you certainly were carrion buzzard-bait last night when they brought you in. We doubted if you would live for questioning. But today you are up on your feet. There is a saying on Venus: 'You cannot kill an Earthman.'"

"I've never been to Venus."

"Nor have I. But I once knew a Cupian maiden. She taught me much. And I taught her a thing or two." His sharp eyes glinted reminiscently.

THE doorway curtain was pushed aside, and Ben-Stu strode in. But what a changed Ben-Stu. The same blue eyes, curly yellow hair, and incongruously Nordic features, it was true; but the charming youth whom Warren had known was now crown prince of Daloss.

Warren staggered to his feet. "Thank God, Sir, it's you!" he exclaimed.

"God? What means this profanity in the presence of a true believer?"

"Thank Erlik, I mean," Warren stammered.

"That's better." The regal look dropped from Ben-Stu's boyish face, and he grinned his old-time friendly grin. "Well, Warren my old friend, it's certainly good to see you again. Please accept my apologies."

"Your apologies for what, Ben?"

"For not bringing you here in person. But sit down. You have been through many trials and tribulations. I can read them in your lined features and tired eyes. Changed plans bring me here unexpectedly. But honestly, when you left me and rode off into the desert on your slith, headed for Daloss, it was not my intent to rejoin my forces for some time, nor did I know where any of them could be reached at the moment, or I could have spared you much suffering. But after all, as they say in England on your planet, 'all's well that ends well.' Here you are, safe and sound. Even your sufferings have not been in vain, for they have demonstrated to me your fortitude and dependability. A true brother, you will be. Well, what happened to you!"

The dark-faced Mauro interrupted grimly with, "Ben-Stu, Read this." And handed him the forged pass.

Ben-Stu read, with a gathering scowl on his blond features. Then wheeling around upon the confused and surprised Earthman, he barked, "So you are a traitor, after all, a henchman of that treacherous crraat, Ak-Ak!"

"Just a minute! Just a minute!" Warren remonstrated, holding up one hand. "I thought that Ak-Ak was a buddy of yours. But I hate him no less than you seem to do. Listen to the story of my adventures, and then judge for yourself where my loyalty lies."

"Very well. Proceed." But his voice was grim, and held little hope.

Nevertheless, Warren proceeded to relate, calmly and dispassionately, his adventures since they two had parted just outside the City of Ricca.

He told how he had fought with, and been captured by, government troops, not knowing them to be Ak-Ak's. How Ak-Ak had surprisingly been enraged at finding him to be a friend of Ben-Stu's, and had attempted to trick him by the ley fugo. But he had slugged Ak-Ak, and had forged this pass to get a slith and equipment and free passage through Ak-Ak's lines. Then all about the pursuit by Ak-Ak's men, Warren's desert wanderings, and finally his capture by Ben-Stu's Mauros, as he battled with the huge bat-lizard in the hole in the desert.

WHEN Warren finished, Ben-Stu coldly remarked, "A likely story!

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What do *you* think, Lieutenant?"

"I think he lies," the black Mauro replied.

"And so do I. Ho, guard, remove the prisoner. We take him to Daloss with us, for sacrifice upon the golden altar of Erlik."

Warren stared with stupefaction at Ben-Stu's cold and haughty face; and now, behind the still unmistakably Nordic features of this desert chieftain of Mars, Warren discerned the black-eagle expression which would have sat more appropriately on a Mauro of the more common gun-metal skin.

There was nothing which Warren could say or do. Squaring his broad shoulders, and setting his lips to a thin purposeful line, he stared straight at his former friend and ally. Ben-Stu stared back haughtily. Two strong men, standing face to face, each trying to stare the other down.

The blond Mauro's eyes faltered first; and the Earthman, satisfied with this momentary victory, and not wishing to embarrass the other to the point of irretrievable hostility, instantly let his own eyes fall. The forged pass lay crumpled on the ground where Ben-Stu had dropped it after reading it. Warren stooped and picked it up.

"Hey! What are you doing with that?" Ben-Stu demanded.

Warren thrust it into one of the pockets of his ragged tunic. "I intend to keep it until, one day, I can prove to you that this pass is a fake and that therefore I am not in the employ of Ak-Ak."

Ben-Stu's dark lieutenant laughed sneeringly. "So he would prove himself not a liar, by proving himself a forger!"

Then the guards seized Warren and led him away, to bind him hand and foot, and throw him in a tent.

The next day the Mauros broke camp. Warren was placed astride a slith, his ankles tied beneath the creature's belly, and his wrists tied to the saddle-horn.

It was a familiar road which they traversed; seemingly endless red sand-dunes, finally giving way to hilly slopes. Small squat bushes and sparse blue-knobbed grey lichenous trees. A shrine of black ersite. Rocky slag-bluffs. Beds of salt, weirdly white amid the desert red. They passed the lichen grove where the Legion of Death had been ambushed three years ago, but had won through. The narrow pass through the mighty Fobian range. And then the towering spires and minarets of Daloss, City of Lost Souls, flanked by jagged mountain ranges, and backed by a high plateau, red and barren and forlorn.

AS THE cavalcade trotted up to the fretwork metal gates in the arched doorway of the high red mud wall which encircled the city, Warren's pulses quickened. In spite of the fact that he was being led to slaughter on the golden altar of the black god Erlik, Don Warren's heart sang with home-coming; for at last, after three long years, he was back again in the City of his beloved, the beautiful Esta. Would he see her before he died?

Attendants unbarred the gates and swung them open, and the cavalcade trotted in on their splay-footed gray reptilian steeds. As the slithmen rode down the wide central street of the city, toward the great black dome of the towering Temple of Erlik, Warren craned his neck from side to side, but saw no face that he recognized. Low red-stucco buildings flanked the street on both sides. Mosaics, azure blue and white and turquoise green, sparkled in the late afternoon sunlight. In the doorways, veiled women stared at the

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troop, but none of them was Esta. From behind latticed windows, other eyes peered out.

The cavalcade reached the temple walls—high walls of red sandstone, with windowed red towers. And above the wall waved the velvety tops of many blood-green ktath-trees, indicating the vast cool gardens which lay beyond. In the midst of these gardens stood the immense black-plastered temple itself, with its seven rainbow-hued spires, and its great bulbous black dome reaching into the Martian sky.

Through the gateway in the high garden wall they padded, and swung off their saddles in the ktath-tree grove. Warren's ankles were cut free from beneath his slith's belly, his wrists were untied from the saddle-horn, and he was yanked unceremoniously from the

A single shot rang through the desert air

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beast's back, to fall in a cramped and weary heap on the red sward of the temple garden.

Ben-Stu, his gaudy cape flapping behind him, strode over to his prostrate captive, stared scornfully down on him for a few tense moments, and then prodded him with one sandaled toe. Warren looked up. Weakly he got to his feet, and faced his tormentor.

His eyes flashed. "Ben-Stu," he said scathingly, "I was a fool to trust the likes of you."

Ben-Stu laughed harshly. "Well this is good! The man whom I found I couldn't trust, is complaining that he can't trust me!"

Ruminatively, Warren thought aloud, "I suppose I ought to tell his father, the Chieftain Mu-Lai. If Ben-Stu is loyal, this would do no harm. If he is a traitor, it may do some good."

"N-n, N-n! No good at all," laughed the young Mauro. "For Mu-Lai already knows your yarn in detail—I have recited it to him—did as dramatic a job of it as you did, when telling it to me."

"Esta would believe me," Warren flung back at him.

"Mm. We shall see." And, with that cryptic remark, Ben-Stu motioned to two of his henchmen, dramatically swished the righthand corner of his gaudy cape across his left shoulder, turned, and stalked away toward the looming black temple of the Dark Star. The two guards seized Warren, and hustled him along in the wake of Ben-Stu.

JUST within the temple, scene of that well-remembered battle of three years ago, Ben-Stu turned sharply to the left. He extracted a large key from the folds of his desert garments, unlocked a small door, and led the way with surefooted ease down a flight of stone steps into stygian darkness below. Gusts of dank musty air welled up out of the depths. Stumbling, Warren was pushed along down the stairs and across the cellar pavement, finally to be flung upon the moist floor. He heard a grated door creak shut behind him and the squeaky sound of a key in a rusty lock. Then without a word, Ben-Stu and the two men left Warren to his bitter thoughts.

He had reached Daloss, the City of Lost Souls, the mecca of his desires, the inaccessible place which he had scarcely dared hope ever to revisit. Here he was at last, yet to what end? Back where he had started, about to be roasted alive on the fiery golden altar, as an offering to Erlik.

As Don Warren lay despairing on the slimy stones of his cell, his thoughts turned to the last remark of Ben-Stu before bringing him here. Warren had mentioned that Esta would believe his story, and Ben-Stu had cryptically replied, "We shall see." Did that remark have some hidden meaning?

As if in answer to Warren's unspoken query, footsteps approached in the corridor outside the bars of the cell. Several persons, one of whom was carrying an electrical flashlight, were coming forward. The beam played upon the grated door of the cell, and a man stepped forward, unlocked the door, and swung it open. The person carrying the light entered the cell, halted, and turned the beam full on Warren, who scrambled to his feet and stood blinking.

Then a glad little cry in a well-remembered voice: "Ah! He told me true! For it *is* the American."

"Esta!" Warren shouted, darting forward, his arms outstretched.

But from behind the girl there came a peremptory "Halt! Lay not profane hands on the daughter of Mu-Lai."

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Warren halted. The girl drew near him. But still he could not see her, because of the dazzling beam which she carried.

"Let me see your glorious face," Warren begged.

The light shifted upward and backward, and illumined features even more dazzling than Warren had remembered. Three years had matured and perfected the youthful promise that had been Esta. The pretty girl had become an incomparable woman. Character had molded the softly cameo-cut face into lineaments of a loveliness positively breath-taking.

The azure eyes now possessed a depth of soul. The aureole of golden curls had taken on a copper glint. Warren had thought Esta's beauty unsurpassable, but the girl had now surpassed even herself.

"Beloved!" Warren murmured brokenly.

Esta stepping forward out of earshot of the guards who had accompanied her, whispered back, "Beloved!" Furthermore she spoke in English, though haltingly.

"Then you are still free?" Warren asked.

"Still free, and still yours, beloved—till death us do part."

DEATH? The word had an ominous connotation, and Esta had uttered it with a little catch in her silvery voice.

She now continued, with a sob, "And death *is* to part us, beloved. Oh, why did you ally yourself with Ak-Ak, our enemy?"

"I did *not!*" Warren indignantly exclaimed. "Surely *you* do not believe that of me!"

"Ah, I knew it. And I told my father and my brother that you would not side with our enemies—except perhaps as a pretense, so as to get through their lines and join us. But Ben-Stu still mistrusts you, and has persuaded my father too to mistrust you."

Gradually they had lapsed back into Martian, for more rapid conversation.

"Then why did Ben Stu let you come to me?"

From the darkness behind Esta, in the corridor beyond the cell door, came the answer, in a masculine voice. "It was I — not Ben-Stu — who brought her here."

A swart and dark-skinned young man, with hooked nose, cruel thin lips, and beady black eyes, stepped forward into the light.

"You!" Warren exclaimed, falling back a pace. "You! Ab-Nadik!"

"The same," the man replied, folding his arms, and grinning evilly.

How much of the conversation had Esta's affianced husband heard, Warren wondered.

"But why should *you* bring Esta to see *me?*"

Ab-Nadik's perfect white teeth showed between his barely parted thin lips. "Perhaps so that I could gloat over the two of you. Perhaps because I love Esta so much that I am willing to grant her this favor. Perhaps because I no longer love her. Who knows." He shrugged the narrow shoulders beneath his gaudy cape.

Turning away from Warren, he shouted to the two guards who had come with Esta, "Leave us now. I am not afraid of this Earthman. Besides I am armed." He patted his sides where the butts of two atomic pistols protruded from the top of his pantaloons. The scraping footsteps of the two guards could be heard receding in the distance.

"Now that there is no danger of your being seen," Ab-Nadik continued, "to each other's arms! I, Ab-Nadik,

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command it. Kiss each other good-bye."

Eagerly Esta moved forward. But Warren was deterred by suspicion. Why should Esta's betrothed order her into the arms of another man? "So! You wish to gloat over our forlorn leave-taking on the eve of the fiery altar!"

"Not at all! Not at all!" Ab-Nadik replied in an injured tone. "I came here to effect your escape."

"You? Why?"

"Perhaps because I fear you up until the very last moment when the flames of Erlik have taken their toll. Perhaps to demonstrate to Esta how much I love her. Perhaps because I do not love her at all, and so hope that you may return and thus save me from a loveless match. Who knows!" Again he shrugged. "The fact remains that neither Mu-Lai nor Ben-Stu trusts you. Nor can either of them be prevailed upon to spare you. But, make haste, or we may be too late."

THIS time Warren and Esta awaited no further urging, as they clasped each other close, forgetting all in the warm throbbing pressure of each other.

Ab-Nadik's gruff voice brought them back to reality. "Enough! Now, Esta, go. It is sufficient risk that I run, without you being here to complicate it."

The lovers kissed once more—lingeringly. Then Esta departed, her blue eyes gleaming happily. "Till we meet again, beloved," she breathed. "I shall be waiting for you."

"All Mars cannot keep us apart!" Warren shouted after her.

Ab-Nadik produced another light from the folds of his flowing garments. "Come," he commanded. "You have been this way before." There was an undercurrent, as of spite, in his words. He pushed Warren ahead of him down the corridor, and unlocked a door. The treasure-chamber of Daloss!

As they made their way toward the other end, Warren ran his hand into one of the chests of ancient gold coins.

"No! None of that!" Ab-Nadik snapped.

"Just one as a souvenir. The one which I took the last time was taken from me when Ak-Ak captured me on my way here."

Ab-Nadik's dark eyes narrowed, and he bit his lip. Then forcing a thin smile, he said, "Very well. And, speaking of Ak-Ak, now is the time for a showdown. Are you loyal to Ben-Stu, or to Mars, or to Ak-Ak?"

What should Warren answer? Which answer did Abe-Nadik expect? And what would be the result of each of the three possible replies?

THEN Warren played a hunch. Ben-Stu and Mu Lai believed him allied with Ak-Ak, and this belief was the cause of his present predicament. He might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. So he said slowly, "If I couldn't deceive Ben-stu, there is no hope of deceiving you. Ak-Ak and I are just like that." He held up one hand with the first two fingers intercrossed.

"Prove it!" Ab-Nadik snapped, thereby indicating to Warren that the latter had chosen the right answer.

For reply, Warren produced the crumbled forged pass from one of the pockets of his tattered tunic. Ab-Nadik inspected it carefully by the light of his electric flash.

"Um! Genuine enough," he declared half to himself. "But you lack discretion. You should never have let Ben-Stu see this."

"But I thought that Ak-Ak and he were allies. Even now I don't know what to think."

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"Ben-Stu is no ally of Ak-Ak. He was just luring him on. But here's where *I* come into the picture. I *am* an ally of Ak-Ak. Play with me, and you can have your freedom, your revenge on Ben-Stu, and—and—one more reward."

"Of course, I will play with you. You are too generous. What do you wish me to do?"

"Take this note of identification to O-Dom, a desert chief who rules the oasis due west of the pass by which you entered these mountains. He is supposed to be an ally of Daloss. Actually he has teamed up with Ak-Ak. Ak-Ak has entrusted O-Dom with a store of high-explosive uranium, which is to be used to blow up the city walls in an assault on Daloss. Such an attempt, being known to the defenders of this city, will never succeed. So tell O-Dom to use the explosive to block off our water-supply. He will know what I mean."

Warren pricked up his ears. What wouldn't the planetary authorities give for this information! For generations, the source of the water-supply of Daloss had been a mystery. Here is a planet, where rain almost never falls except at the two poles, a planet the entire water-supply of which is derived from the melting of the polar snow-caps, and is carried to all other regions solely by man-made canals. How incongruous, with this set-up, then, is the phenomenon of a city located far from any of the canals, and yet amply supplied with water, in fact even blessed with springs and brooks! How incongruous likewise is the phenomenon of an oasis in the midst of the red desert! Strange that no-one ever mentally linked together these two paradoxes!

Warren's reverie was interrupted by Ab-Nadik thrusting into Warren's face the note which he had written, and exclaiming, "Come, come! Wake up!"

INSTANTLY Warren was on the alert. Yet he feigned continued stupefaction, Passing the back of one hand across his eyes with a tired gesture, he said, "Please forgive me, but I am still a bit dizzy from my desert hardships. I'll be all right in a moment. And may I please have my own Ak-Ak pass back, Sir?"

Grudgingly, Ab-Nadik handed it over.

"And now, how do I get to O'Dom's oasis?" Warren asked.

"Follow me!" Ab-Nadik unlocked a door in the farther side of the treasure-chamber and led the way down a long dark winding tunnel, until finally dim moonlight showed ahead through a grating. This grating Ab-Nadik also unlocked. They stepped out into the clear cool Martian night.

A slith was tethered close by—a slith slung with canteen, arms, and desert rations.

"You and I fought each other once before," said Ab-Nadik. "Remember? But there are no hard feelings, for we are allies now." He held out his hand.

"You mentioned a third reward for this alliance—a third reward in addition to my freedom and revenge on Ben-Stu."

Ab-Nadik's teeth flashed. "The third reward is—Esta."

"Esta?" Warren could hardly believe that he had heard aright!

"Yes. Esta. I no longer love her. Since she gave her heart to you three years ago, she has been damaged goods, so far as I am concerned. I have dissembled so as to deceive Mu-Lai, her father. But I love another, who will be my queen when I rule over Daloss. Esta will become a mere slave—a plaything which I can bestow on whomever I choose. She is yours, my friend—

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to do with as you wish—you do not even need to marry her!"

"Why — you — beast!" Warren hissed. He wheeled and swung one fist square against the mocking grinning line of teeth that gleamed in the light of the twin moons. Ab-Nadik, defamer of Esta, went out cold.

Warren jerked free the knot that tethered the slith, vaulted into the saddle, and streaked off through the night, with a pad-pad of soft splay hooves.

A sputtered oath behind him apprised him that Ab-Nadik had recovered his wits. The sharp hiss of an atomic blast sped close to Warren's head—Ab-Nadik had opened fire. Warren leaned low over the pommel, his face against the stinking neck of his reptilian mount. Then consciousness dissolved in a burst of pyrotechnic sparks, and he knew no more.

After interminable ages he reopened his eyes. He was lying in thick red moss, and the sun was on the western horizon. Sore and dizzy he staggered to his feet, and felt himself carefully all over. Intact, though his head ached splittingly and the desert all about him seemed to reel and teeter and spin.

No sign anywhere of the slith which had borne him thus far. Well, perhaps he could stagger on through the night toward the oasis of O-Dom, if he but knew where that oasis was.

HE TOOK out the note which Ab-Nadik had given him, and spelled out its pictographs: "This will introduce Wahr-En. His message from me is authentic. He is a gentleman. Ab-Nadik."

Thrusting it back into his pocket, Warren looked out across the red desert toward the setting sun. To his surprise, he saw mountains there! There should be no mountains to the *westward*. Certainly the slith could not have carried him unconscious clear through the Fobian Mountains; yet only thus could they now lie to the westward.

Then he noticed that the setting sun was rising in the west. He laughed aloud. It was the *rising* sun—it was rising in the *east*. He had been all turned around!

Now facing to the *true* west, he discerned on the horizon a speck, which might be—must be—an oasis.

Toward it he resolutely set forth across the cool green morning sands.

The sun rose higher. The cool green morning sands became the hot sweltering red sands of noonday. Yet still Don Warren trudged on. The spot on the horizon widened and heightened. It was indeed an oasis. Filled with renewed courage, Warren squared his shoulders, set his jaws, and—made it!

Just before sundown he staggered up to the edges of a community of low stone houses, tents, tilled garden patches, and a few gray lichen-trees growing amid huge boulders and ledges of red sandstone.

A black-skinned hawk-visaged sentinel in shabby dirty desert pantaloons and cape, and armed with a rifle of ancient vintage, halted him on the outskirts of the village.

Warren thrust his hand into his pocket for the note from Ab-Nadik, and came up with the forged Ak-Ak pass. Some sixth sense persuaded him to accept this as an omen. He handed over the forged pass, instead of Ab-Nadik's note.

The sentinel evidently could not read, but the writing appeared to impress him. Motioning Warren to walk ahead, so that he could keep him covered by his ancient weapon, he prodded him toward a nearby stone hut. Here merged a more presentable and intelligent-appearing black-man.

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This individual slowly spelled out the pass, then beamed on Warren with a friendly toothy smile.

"Welcome, friend," he said, "but why do you come on foot? And where do you come from?"

"I come from Ab-Nadik of Daloss. My slith threw me, a day's march from here, after I had traveled all night. I must have become sleepy, or I would not have lost control of the beast. Now I am hungry and thirsty, as well as tired. But mostly am I thirsty. And I have an important message for the great, the noble, O-Dom."

WITH simple grace and hospitality, the officer invited Warren to enter his humble quarters, and poured out for him a tall mug of desert wine, surprisingly cool, and not cloying, in spite of its syrupy consistency.

A dirty black servant now brought the evening meal—a sticky bitter-tasting red paste, the staple dish of desert-dwellers, very filling and satisfying.

There followed a smoke—long hollow twigs of gray lichen, stuffed with orra-root tobacco.

Warren sat in the doorway, and puffed away with his friendly desert tribesman, as the green shadows fell over the red expanse of Mars, and cool breezes sprang up among the rocks and lichen-trees, and little bat-lizards flitted to and fro, while the lesser moon hurtled across the sky from west to east, and Warren felt that it wasn't such a bad world after all.

For the first time since his discharge from the penal battalion, he felt a modicum of peace and satisfaction. He had seen his Esta again. She still loved him. And—for the moment—he was safe and free.

In an outpouring of gratitude to the fates, he turned toward his host and exclaimed, "Sir, you are a gentleman!"

The effect of these words was sudden and unexpected. With a scream of rage, his host sprang to his feet, snatched out an atomic pistol, and leveled it at Warren. The man's gun-metal face turned an even darker hue in the pale moonlight. His acquiline features were contorted into a hideous snarl.

"Take that back!" he shrieked, waving his weapon menacingly.

WARREN stumbled to his feet, and staggered backward. "Take what back?" he gasped. "I meant only to compliment you—to pay you a deserved tribute for your hospitality."

His swarthy host lowered the gun. "I forgot that you are an earthman and a city dweller," he said. "Please forgive my outburst."

"But what did I say amiss?" Warren persisted.

The other levelly replied, "To call a desert-dweller a 'gentleman' is a deadly insult. To us, 'gentleman' means a member of the hated red nobility of Mars, who keep us desert-folk from our rightful heritage. We kill all gentlemen."

"I'm sorry," Warren murmured contritely. "I did not know. All that I meant was that you have been most kind and courteous to me."

And then, as they resumed their seats and lit two more long lichen cigarettes, Warren's mind suddenly flashed back to the note which Ab-Nadik had given him: "This will introduce Wahr-En. His message from me is authentic. He is a gentleman."

So *that* was it! Instructions to O-Dom to accept the message about dynamiting the water supply, but to kill the bearer. Ab-Nadik *did* love Esta after all, and was taking this means to "kill two bat-lizards with one stone," i. e.: get a message to O-Dom, and rid himself of a rival. How fortunate that

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Warren had shown instead the forged pass from Ak-Ak!

But now, what was he to show to O-Dom? The pass itself might do to satisfy this simple guileless black man with whom Warren now sat smoking, but it would hardly suffice such a wily desert chieftain as O-Dom.

His host cut in on his thoughts with, "O-Dom is not here this evening. Sleep in my humble house, and I will lead you to him on the morrow."

Anything to postpone the reckoning, thought Warren, eagerly assenting. Soon he was curled up on sleeping rugs spread on a pile of fragrant lichen-twigs.

He cudgeled his brains for some solution of what to say to O-Dom on the morrow, but no thoughts came. And the next thing that he knew, it was morning.

After breakfast—the same pungent red paste—his host led him to a large sandstone hut in the center of the village. A mangy sentinel paced up and down in front of the door. To the sentinel, the man explained who Warren was; then left him, stating that he had duties to perform, but would see him later.

The sentinel ushered Warren inside into what appeared to be an office of sorts, and told him to sit down and wait. The Chief would be there presently.

A STYLUS on the table gave Warren a sudden idea. The Martian symbol for "one" lacks but a single pencil-stroke of being the Martian symbol for "none." In an instant he had altered the fatal message from Ab-Nadik to O-Dom by the addition of that single stroke. Its concluding sentence now read: "He is *no* gentleman." O-Dom would take that to mean that Warren, in spite of being a city feller, was okeh.

A black man, in clean white blouse and pantaloons, a gaudily striped cape, and wide desert hat, stalked into the room. His face, though haughty, seemed not overly intelligent.

"I am O-Dom," he stated loudly. "Who are you, Earthman?"

"I am Wahr-En, a former prisoner of the hated aristocrats. I bear a message from your friend and ally, Ab-Nadik of Daloss." He handed over the recently altered note.

O-Dom read it slowly. "And what is the message which my friend has entrusted to you? It must be indeed important, that he trusts it not to paper."

What was Warren to give as the message? Certainly he did not wish to be a party to cutting off the water-supply from the city of his Esta. Why hadn't he thought up some substitute message, all this while?

Slowly and haltingly he began, "Ab-Nadik says that you have just received a shipment of high-explosive uranium isotope from Colonel Ak-Ak. Ab-Nadik wishes me to take that shipment—and—"

"Well?" O-Dom's shoe-button eyes narrowed and bored into Warren.

This would never do. Suddenly the inspiration came. Warren had found the solution of his difficulties. He would prevent, rather than carry out, Ab-Nadik's plan. He would secure the explosive on a pretext, and then destroy it. He threw his head back, breathed deeply, and smiled.

"As I was saying when you interrupted me," he continued with dignity, "Ab-Nadik wishes *me* to take the explosive, and blow up the water-supply of Daloss. You are to show me where, but I am to do the deed."

"But what about the original plan of using the explosive in an assault on the walls?"

"Ab-Nadik is convinced that you

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can never reach the walls. The mountain pass is manned, for Mu-Lai expects an attack. Why expose yourself and your men to slaughter, when thirst will lay low the mighty city of Daloss."

The black man pursed his lips ruminatively. "An excellent plan! The plan of a genius! I will do it!"

He clapped his hands. An attendant entered.

"Get Rah-Tray," he commanded, "and send him here with the explosive."

THE attendant departed. O-Dom motioned Warren to a stool, and handed him a lichen cigaret. As they smoked and waited, O-Dom rapidly sketched to Warren the plans for the seizure of Daloss. Ak-Ak was due to arrive any day now, with his renegade Martian troops and thousands of desert tribesmen whom he had been gathering. The desert-dwellers had long been jealous of their brethren in the snug city of Daloss. No longer would Daloss lord it over them. Daloss and all its riches would be looted.

The rebels had depended upon treachery within Daloss to help them. Now the traitor had turned traitor—Ben-Stu had proved loyal to his father after all. But fortunately this defection had brought them a new ally, Ab-Nadik, who planned to rule over the ruins of Daloss, with Mu-Lai's daughter Esta as his queen.

O-Dom babbled on, as Warren secretly clenched his hands at the impious thought.

A fierce hook-nosed young Mauro stalked in and saluted. "The squad is ready, Sire."

"Rah-Tray," O-Dom announced, "this is Wahr-En, an emissary of Ab-Nadik. Take him and the explosive to the springs. Properly placed, the explosive will cause all of Daloss to die of thirst." His dark eyes gleamed evilly at the thought of so much suffering. "And now, Wahr-En, go. And may Erlik go with you."

Warren saluted. "The same to you, Sir." But in his mind, he reversed the thought, so that it became: "To Erlik with all of you."

Warren stepped outside. To his consternation, he noted that Rah-Tray had with him a score or more of black warriors. One was carrying a small box—the explosive evidently.

"Hand it over!" Warren demanded.

But Rah-Tray shook his head. "We shall carry it for you," he replied. "Follow me."

He led the way up onto one of the ledges of red rock, and down through a cleft. Torches were produced and lighted. Far down in the cavern below them could be heard the hollow drip and lapping of water.

"At this spot seeps the leakage from the great canal," said Rah-Tray. "Here we draw the water for our crops and our sustenence. And from here runs an underground river, straight to Daloss. I think that *I* know better than you do, Earthman, just where to set off the blast that will seal the tunnel."

"The request from Ab-Nadik, concurred in by O-Dom, was that *I* was to have the honor."

"You shall have the *honor*—all in due time—but I shall name the place. Did not O-Dom say that I was to guide you. No city-dweller before you has ever even known the secret of the water supply of Daloss and of this oasis. I think it was a great mistake to let even you know."

THEY had by now come within sight of the subterranean stream. Warren would have to act quickly if he was to save Daloss—if he was to save even himself.

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"Just a minute, Rah-Tray," he said, walking up to the other. Then suddenly, "Look out behind you!"

It was an old gag, but evidently a new one on Mars, or at least in this primitive community. As Rah-Tray instinctively wheeled around, Warren reached out with both hands and snatched the two atomic pistols from the waist-band of Rah-Tray's pantaloons. Backing quickly away, he covered the group with a sweep of his weapons.

With a cry of surprise the man who was carrying the small box of uranium isotope, let it fall as he raised his hands aloft. Mercifully it did not explode.

"Back! Up the cavern!" Warren shouted.

For reply, a sizzling ray of flame stabbed down through the flickering darkness, grazing Warren's left shoulder with a searing pain. An answering flash from one of his own weapons laid his assailant low. The other desert men turned and bolted up the cavern.

But, instead of leaving, they took refuge behind projections on either side, a short distance away. Warren too dropped behind a sheltering ledge.

For some time they sniped at one another with atomic weapons, aiming at each other's flashes.

Then came a shout from the entrance of the cave, rolling through the air, "Colonel Ak-Ak has arrived. He says that the Earthmen is an imposter, and must be captured at all costs."

"Don't I know it!" Ray-Tray sang back. "Come on men, let's rush him."

Out from behind their protecting rocks the desert men poured. One of Warren's weapons went dead. How many blasts remained in the other he could not know. But he did know that he was about to be overpowered by sheer weight of numbers. Not only was he confronted by the original squad, but other tribesmen, carrying torches and atomic rifles were pouring into the cavern.

One of the vanguard tripped over the little box of uranium, and fell, cursing.

Why not? Taking careful aim, Warren poured a steady stream of concentrated atomic force into the box of explosive.

A CURTAIN of blasting fire choked the entire cavern in front of him. With a deafening crash, the air, the rocks above, below him, and on each side swept back to engulf him. The fiery wall receded, as Warren was wafted into nothingness.

Space closed in on him, wetly, coldly, oppressively. He could not breathe. He was under water—water which was buffeting him, tumbling him head over heels.

Instinct led him to hold his breath—though his lungs were bursting—to strike out with arms and legs, to try to swim.

His head cleaved the surface in stygian darkness. He drew a deep tortured breath, only to suck in a choking mouthful of water as a foaming wave struck him in the face.

Sinking once more, Warren cleared his lungs. Then he shot high in air amid the whirlpool eddies—high enough to breathe a full breath before dropping back again.

So he struggled on. The torrent roared. It dashed him against sharp rocks, first on one side, then on the other. Gradually he weakened.

Light showed ahead. Was it the end of the tunnel? Open air once more?

Now he could dimly see his surroundings. There seemed to be a shore, a ledge, along the left bank of this subterranean stream. Diffused sunlight

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filtered down through a shaft from above.

Then darkness once more, as the swift current swirled him along. Limp and almost unresisting, Warren was hurled head-foremost against one wall of the cave, and knew no more.

Was this death? A soft fragrant bed cradling his aching limbs. Tender hands soothing his fevered brow. A silvery voice crooning to him.

He opened his eyes. Esta's golden-framed face smiled solicitously down at him.

"Oh, my beloved," she breathed, "you came back to me. I knew you would."

Just outside the room were other voices, harsh voices.

The stern tones of Mu-Lai, saying, "Ab-Nadik insists that he die, my son. You yourself brought him here to kill him. What has changed your mind?"

The equally stern tones of Ben-Stu, saying, "We shall see."

Frantically Esta flung her arms around him, crying, "They shall not have you, my beloved. You are mine. I found you in the well, when I went with the other maidens to draw water. No one was supposed to know that you are here."

Raising himself on his elbow, and gently disengaging himself from the entwining arms of the girl, Warren called, "Oh, Ben-Stu, Mu-Lai, come hither, quickly."

THE dark regal hawk-nosed chieftain and his blond son stalked into the room.

"At last I can prove my loyalty," Warren asserted. He produced the note which Ab-Nadik had given him, soggy and almost a pulp, but still legible. "I changed a 'gentleman' to read 'no gentleman'," he explained. "Ab-Nadik wished me killed after I had delivered the message. Oh—and by the way—I punched his face just before I left here. He had insulted Esta."

Ben-Stu grinned his old-time grin. "So that's where he got his split lip. Said he ran against a door in the dark. But I wondered."

But Mu-Lai's face darkened. "And what *was* Ab-Nadik's message—and to whom?" he incisively demanded.

"It was to O-Dom, to blow up the water-supply of Daloss."

Ben-Stu too darkened, "And you delivered that message?"

"Certainly."

The two Mauros faced each other with narrowed eyes. "He dies," they declared in unison.

"No! No!" Esta shrieked, flinging her arms around Warren again.

"Look here!" Warren exclaimed angrily, "I set off the explosive myself. Your water-supply is still intact. In fact," rather ruefully, "I believe that I came down it myself. And, I rather think—at least that's what I tried to do—that I cut off O-Dom's water-supply instead."

Suddenly a look of comprehension flashed across Ben-Stu's boyish face. "Quick father! While we stand stupidly here, questioning the good faith of a loyal frend and ally, that traitor Ab-Nadik is undoubtedly making his getaway."

Mu-Lai gave his son one long startled look. Then the two of them dashed from the room.

Warren tried to rise and follow, but fell back exhausted upon the pillows.

After all it was sweeter to lie there and be ministered unto by Esta.

LATER Mu-Lai and Ben-Stu returned to report ruefully that Ab-Nadik had made a clean getaway on a swift slith.

Warren, by now somewhat rested

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and refreshed, told all that he knew of the plans for the attack.

Thus forewarned, the forces of Daloss, manned passes; but were gradually driven back. Ak-Ak had rounded up too many jealous desert blacks. The seige of Daloss began in dead earnest.

Before falling back behind their almost impregnable city walls, the denizens of Daloss harvested or destroyed all crops in the surrounding hemmed-in mountain valley.

Daloss was prepared to withstand a long seige. The enemy had to bring their supplies from afar. They possessed no cannon, nor bombing planes —in fact cannon were unknown on Mars, being unnecessary on a planet which (at least nominally) was under one government. And no planes (nor even rocket ships) dared traverse the gusty heights of the Fobian Mountains.

But, unless aid came, Daloss must eventually fall. And from whom could aid come? Not from the desert tribes, which had all turned against their erstwhile Capitol. Nor from the government, which was unaware that Colonel Ak-Ak was operating without their sanction and against their interests.

Something must be done to break the siege. But what?

"If we could only get a small force through the enemy," Ben-Stu mused, "we might possibly be able to sever their lines of communication."

"I wonder if we could go back up the underground river along which I made my escape," suggested Don Warren, now fully recovered from his harrowing ordeal.

"To what use? You reported that you blew up and closed the only other entrance to the caves."

Suddenly Warren remembered something. "There was another entrance," he declared excitedly. "I remembered a light above the river at one spot, just before I lost consciousness. It can't be far distant from here, for the light seemed to come from a break high up in the mountains. And, Ben-Stu, the mountains do not extend far eastward from this city."

The Mauro nodded comprehension.

JUST before daybreak one morning, a hundred of the bravest and youngest of the Mauro warriors set out, headed by Don Warren and Ben-Stu. All were clad in red blouses, pantaloons and broad sun-hats, the color of the red sands of Mars.

They arrived at the watering-place of the city. No cave apparently led into or out of the wells of Daloss. But here the current of the stream was not swift. Warren, hatless, with a long rope tied around his body beneath his shoulders, plunged into the icy waters and swam submerged up the subterranean stream.

Finally his head cleared the surface in absolute darkness. He held onto the rocky side of the channel and gave two tugs on the rope—the prearranged signal that all was well. Then he took out an electric torch wrapped in oiled parchment, undid the wrappings, and played the light about.

He saw a wide ledge of rock beside the spot where he clung dripping wet. Pulling himself up onto it, he signalled again. Then slowly but surely he hauled Ben-Stu through to join him.

Time and again the two men let the rope trail off into the dark depths of the subterranean stream, and then hauled it back again with one of their party clinging to its end.

After several hours, the full hundred —soaked to the skin—stood on the rocky ledge. The last rope-load carried the broad sun-hats of the party. They then set out, cautiously marching upstream. The ledge persisted until

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they saw light ahead, when they reached the shaft which Warren had passed in his mad swirling stream-swept journey. Up this natural chimney, they scrambled, and finally stood at the summit.

To the eastward they could just barely discern the black tip of the Temple of Erlik in the city from which they had come. To the westward spread the vast expanse of the red desert of Mars.

Creeping to the edge of the peak, they peered over. An unscalable precipice, but not much over a hundred feet deep. The rope which had led them safely through the water caves was long enough to reach twice to the red sands below.

There were no signs of the enemy—all were evidently in the valley of Daloss and in the pass which led to it. So typing two reaches of the rope firmly to sharp projections at the top of the cliff, they lowered themselves over the edge one by one, and went down the ropes hand over hand. One man remained behind above, to cut the ropes free, and stand watch, and finally return to Daloss through the caves to report to Mu-Lai on the progress of the expedition.

Creeping inconspicuously along the foot of the towering red cliffs, the rest set out southward toward the cleft in the rocks which led toward Daloss.

JUST within the pass they found hundreds of sliths, belonging to the invading army, guarded by a mere handful of dozing sentinels.

Unseen as yet, the forces of Ben-Stu and Warren divided the guards between them, a dozen or so drawing a bead on each guard. Then at a signal, atomic force blazed suddenly forth from all their weapons. The poor guards never knew they were hit.

Instantly the Mauros rushed in. Each man saddled and bridled a slith. They cut the rest loose from their picket-lines, and herded them out across the plain.

But evidently they had not captured all the enemy mounts, for soon twice their number of Ak-Ak's renegade Martian cavalry came charging out in pursuit.

"Shall we fight or flee?" asked Ben-Stu, spurring his lumbering reptilian steed up beside Don Warren.

"If we flee," the American replied, "we'll have all these fellows to cope with, plus whoever is left at the oasis. Let's *pretend* to flee, send the unsaddled sliths ahead with just a squad of herders, and then suddenly turn on our pursuers."

"Agreed," Ben-Stu shouted. Quickly gathering his men around him, he explained the tactics.

The riderless beasts were herded ahead. The riders gradually fell behind. Consequently the enemy easily overtook them. Suddenly Ben-Stu's forces wheeled, and charged straight at the oncoming enemy cavalry.

At such close quarters, rifles—even atomic pistols—were ineffective. Ben-Stu's men had no spears nor sabers, customary weapons of these wild desert fighters. But the sheer force of their charge bore down the enemy—crumpled them back upon themselves.

And, in the confusion, Mauro after Mauro snatched a weapon which some luckless enemy cavalryman was trying to draw. Then it was cut and slash, cut and slash. Ak-Ak's men, still outnumbering Ben-Stu's, but depleted in weapons, tried to form their ranks in battle array.

But they never recovered from the confusion of that first unexpected assault. They broke rapidly and streamed out across the desert, back

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toward the Fobian Range. The Mauros, halting and taking careful aim, poured atomic death into the fleeing enemy.

Finally all wounded sliths of both sides, and all wounded men of Ak-Ak's cavalry were put out of their misery. A squad was left to round up such of the riderless mounts as were still unharmed by the battle, and to bring on the Mauro wounded.

THE rest of the Mauros set out at an easy pad-footed lope across the red sands toward the spot where lay the oasis of O-Dom. The first brush with the enemy had been a success, although nearly half of their brave little Mauro band had perished.

Early in the afternoon the cavalcade reached the oasis. But this formerly fertile spot now lay parched and brown. The tents were gone. The buildings seemed deserted.

"You evidently did a thorough job with your explosion, Warren," Ben-Stu somewhat bitterly remarked. "I had counted on getting food and water here for ourselves and our sliths. I had assumed that this oasis would be a stopping point for the supply trains of our enemies. Here I had planned to waylay those supply trains."

"Look," Warren replied, pointing to a small garden-bed alongside one of the buildings. "There must be *some* water here, and the inhabitants have not been gone for long. This bed has been recently watered."

Standing up in his stirrups and facing around, Ben-Stu shouted, "Ho, men! Dismount, and tether the sliths. Then proceed warily to search the buildings one by one. This may be an ambush."

Warren, taking a squad, made for the headquarters-building of O-Dom. The door stood ajar, and creaked as it teetered almost imperceptibly in a slight desert breeze. Warren stepped cautiously inside, and paused for his eyes to become accustomed to the change from the desert glare. Warily he peered around behind the door—no-one there.

But from behind him—neither he nor any of his followers could ever explain where the man came from—the hard round end of an atomic pistol was poked into his ribs, and a harsh vonce growled, "Hands up—and no crraat-business!"

Up slowly went Warren's hands. A touch on one shoulder forced him around to face out through the doorway.

The voice continued, "One move from any of you men of Daloss, and your leader dies. And now, my own men, come out of the shadows and disarm the invaders."

"Ab-Nadik!" exclaimed one of Warren's Mauros. So that was who it was! Ab-Nadik, the renegade, now allied with the enemies of his own city.

A dozen or so desert Mauros crowded out of the doorway. Warren's men stood irresolute. Ben-Stu hurried up, attracted by the commotion.

"Stand back," Ab-Nadik warned him, "or I'll blast your friend!"

"And then what?" Ben-Stu coolly replied. "If you kill Wahr-En, you will no longer have any threat to hold over us, and we can then mow down you and your desert crraats. So—"

"Just a moment!" Warren hastily interposed. "Ben-Stu, listen intently to what I am going to say—." He paused. He could feel Ab-Nadik grow tense and expectant behind him.

WHEELING suddenly, Warren brushed aside the muzzle of the weapon by the turn of his body. The weapon blazed, sending a searing pain through Warren's side. But, gritting his teeth, he planted his right fist with

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every bit of force left in him, squarely against the point of Ab-Nadik's jaw.

A second sizzle of atomic fire shot past Warren, and Ab-Nadik's dead form slumped to the floor in the doorway.

Ben-Stu thrust his pistol back into the waistband of his red pantaloons, as he held out one hand to Warren, with his old-time quizzical grin. "Shake," he said, "We coordinated that, like clockwork. Hurt badly?"

Warren shook his head.

A sizzle of atomic fire from both sides. Two men of Daloss, and every one of Ab-Nadik's desert henchmen went down.

"Water! Water!" moaned one of the wounded.

"What do you mean, water?" sneered one of the men of Daloss, striding over to him, and drawing a sword to give him the coup de grace.

"Just a moment!" Warren interposed. "There *is* water here. If he will show us where it is, let's spare his life."

Haltingly the dying man of the desert gave directions to a well in the rocks, from which a scant supply of water was obtained. A thorough search of the oasis rounded up enough food for all the men and beasts.

Then a lookout reported, "A caravan approaches from the west."

"Ah!" Warren remarked. "Food and ammunition for the beseigers. We are just in time to waylay it, and destroy the supplies. Then the seige must fail."

A second lookout reported, "But cavalry approach from the direction of Daloss."

Ben-Stu and Warren hastened to the east edge of the oasis.

"It must be the whole main body of Ak-Ak's government command," Ben-Stu wryly observed. "Perhaps we shall *not* succeed in waylaying the caravan after all. Ho, men! Bring in all the sliths, and conceal them in the center of the oasis, then conceal yourselves in the stone houses and rock ledges at the east side of the oasis, and withhold your fire until you can make every blast tell. Erlik willing, we may yet drive Ak-Ak's cowardly hordes before the caravan gets here."

"Not so cowardly!" Warren remarked. "A large part of that outfit is the Interplanetary Legion, in which I once served."

"If they are like you, my brother, we are indeed up against tremendous odds," Ben-Stu grudgingly admitted.

THERE were two or three thousand men in the approaching cavalry. They drew rein just beyond atomic range, and Colonel Ak-Ak at their head shouted for Ab-Nadik.

No answer.

"Who *is* there?"

Still no answer.

A small detachment galloped up to reconnoiter. The defenders loosed every blast in their possession, and the detachment recoiled in disorder.

A conference among the attackers ensued. Of course Colonel Ak-Ak could not know how many men of Daloss there were; and doubtless the cavalry which Ben-Stu and Warren had defeated en route to here, had exaggerated tenfold or one hundredfold the number of those who had defeated them.

While the conference out on the red sands of the desert was in progress, a lookout from the other side of the oasis reported to Ben-Stu, "The caravan is not a caravan, Sire. It consists of thousands of government troops."

"We are licked," groaned the young Mauro chieftain.

"Licked nothing!" Warren exclaimed. "We're going out to meet them."

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"Oh, so you would turn me in to the Martian authorities?" Ben-Stu sneered surprisingly.

"Look here!" Warren exclaimed exasperated. "You and I have kept alternately trusting and mistrusting each other since we first met each other. Yet always each of us has found the other worthy of trust. Unless we stick together now, all is lost. Come on!"

Ben-Stu sighed. "All right, Warren. I might as well be hung for a slith as a crraat. Lead on!" To his men, he commanded, "Hold out at all costs until we return."

Taking two sliths from the center of the oasis, the two friends trotted out onto the desert to the eastward. Behind them, on the other side of the oasis, they could hear the sizzle and zip, the shouts and cries and groans, of the start of the battle.

In a few minutes they reached the head of the approaching column, and held up their right hands in the sign of peace.

The leader of the government troops was a handsome young red Martian, wearing the insignia of Colonel of the Imperial Army.

"We are Ben-Stu, son of Mu-Lai of Daloss; and Donald Warren, Earthman, formerly a Sergeant of the Interplanetary Legion." Warren announced.

The Martian Colonel scowled at the mention of the dread Mu-Lai. Then replied, "And I am Ed-Garth, Governor General of this desert and of the Fobian Mountains."

"An empty title," Ben-Stu sneered. "We Mauros do not recognize—."

"Pipe down, for Heav— for Erlik's sake," Warren interrupted. Then, "Colonel, you are just in time to perfect that empty title." Rapidly he sketched the situation—how Ak-Ak, using government troops to further his own ambitions, had stirred up the wild desert tribes for an unauthorized war on Daloss.

Colonel Ed-Garth's keen mind worked with steel-trap speed and precision. "And if I intervene, what?" he snapped.

"Free entry into Daloss." Ben-Stu's quick reply surprised even himself.

The Colonel hesitated only a moment.

"Come on, men!" he shouted to his staff. "Column follow at a slow gallop." Then he, Ben-Stu and Warren streaked off at full speed to circle the oasis.

THEY found the cavalry of Colonel Ak-Ak just forming for what was to be the final overwhelming assault on the handful of Mauro defenders. A big cheer went up from Ak-Ak's men at the prospect of reinforcements.

But Ak-Ak's own gross red face went pale. Ed-Garth rode up to him, pointed one lean red hand at him, and shouted, "Ak-Ak, you are relieved of your command! I place you under arrest for high treason."

"By what authority?" Ak-Ak shouted back. "You are only a Colonel, the same as I am. I wouldn't be surprised if I outrank you." Truculently he twirled one of his long moustachios with his left hand. Under cover of this gesture, he snatched an atomic pistol from his belt and leveled it at the Governor General.

A sizzling spurt of atomic fire! But it was not from the weapon of Ak-Ak. Instead it was from the gun of Ben-Stu, who had drawn his weapon just a shade ahead of Ak-Ak. Ak-Ak pitched headlong from his saddle onto the red sands.

A menacing growl rose from the serried ranks of his men. But Ed-Garth, sitting proudly erect on his slith, spurred up to them, pointing dramatically with one index finger toward the

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insignia of rank on his military tunic.

The soldiers cringed and subsided, as Ed-Garth's own outfit galloped up.

Turning to Ben-Stu, Ed-Garth acknowledged, "Chief, you saved my life just now. If I had any doubts as to you, they are dissolved. Lead on to Daloss."

The cool green shadows were falling over the foothills of the mighty Fobian Mountains, as the government troops and the survivors of the expedition from Daloss late that day entered the pass which led to the gates of the City of Lost Souls.

At the head rode Ben-Stu, Don Warren, Governor General Ed-Garth, and the latter's staff.

"We've got all the desert tribes hemmed in between us and the walls of Daloss," hopefully suggested a staff-officer. "Now is our chance to wipe them out."

But Ben-Stu emphatically interposed, "No! If there is to be peace from now on between Mars and my people, it must embrace *all* of my people, even including those who mistakenly were induced to rebel against the leadership of my father."

"So be it," Colonel Ed-Garth replied. "Tell them to lay down their arms, and they will be spared."

"They will *keep* their arms!" Ben-Stu incisively declared.

Acting through officers of the outfit which had formerly been Ak-Ak's, he summoned the chieftains of the various tribes from their campfires, and curtly informed them that the war was over, that Daloss had won, with the aid of Imperial Mars, and that, if they did not create any further disturbance, they could depart in peace.

Satisfied, the chieftains agreed.

THEN Ben-Stu, Warren and Ed-Garth and their retinue pressed on to the walls of Daloss.

In spite of the young Mauro's hail, the sentinels on the wall refused to open the gates. "How do we know, oh Ben-Stu, that you are not under compulsion?"

"Quite true," Ben-Stu observed aside to Ed-Garth. "Well, I guess I'll have to go inside alone and convince them."

"And how am I to know that, once inside, you will not defy me?" Ed-Garth pointedly asked. "Even now, this very minute, your men and the desert tribesmen whom you have just pardoned may be manning the heights to ambush us."

It was a plausible suggestion. Warren stared inquiringly at his friend.

But Ben-Stu exploded, "I have had enough of trust and distrust. Eh, Wahr-En?"

Warren nodded.

"Very well," Ed-Garth replied with narrowed eyes and drawn lips. "I'll take a chance. We can make a fight of it if there is treachery." He gave the signal to back up; and Ben-Stu, Don Warren and their red-clad men trotted up alone to the city gates. The portals opened, and the delegation passed inside.

Hawk-nosed Mu-Lai was waiting for them. Warmly he embraced his son, who quickly sketched the situation. Mu-Lai at first emphatically demurred against giving-up the traditional isolation of Daloss, but the prospect of being recognized as the unquestioned head of all the Mauros, with official government support, finally convinced him.

"Yes, I suppose it is for the best," he grudgingly admitted. "Let them enter."

The gates opened once more, and Ben-Stu and Don Warren galloped their sliths back to the Martian column.

"Are you game to enter alone into the City of Lost Souls?" Ben-Stu asked

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with a twinkle in his eyes. "For of course until the treaty with the Imperial Council is negotiated and signed, we cannot admit such a vast concourse of government troops."

Colonel Ed-Garth grinned also. For answer, he drove his spurs into his slith. The three men entered the city. The gates closed behind them, and they dismounted.

Haughtily regal Mu-Lai approached and was introduced. A torchlit crowd gathered.

"I never thought to meet the great Mu-Lai face to face," Ed-Garth declared respectfully.

Warren spied Esta in the crowd, and hastened to her side. Their arms intertwined, they stood and watched the parley.

Mu-Lai was saying, "General, you are the first outsider ever to enter this sacred city of Erlik—and live. Unbelievers always perish on the golden altar in the Temple of the Dark Star. I hope you appreciate the honor of being the first exception."

"Why!" Esta indignantly exclaimed, snuggling close to Warren, "He forgets *you*, my beloved."

"A good idea," Warren replied, as he led her away into the darkness. "Let's hope that they all forget the both of us for a few minutes, so that we can be alone together at last, after all these years."

He kissed her, sweetly and softly.

THE END

SHEEP-EATING PARROT

By DAN BURKE

IF A man gets hungry enough he'll eat many things that would ordinarily prove distasteful to him. He might even resort to cannibalism as several starving explorers have been known to do. Once well fed again, however, man will go back to his customary eating habits. Naturalists have likewise learned that most animals will react like man to hunger. Animals may temporarily change their eating habits in the face of extreme hunger to return to normal after their hunger is satisfied. But the kea, a New Zealand parrot, has learned to eat meat and still likes it.

When the kea was first discovered in 1856, he was eking out a living in the southern part of New Zealand where the country was mountainous and barren. Gobbling and grubbing about, the kea managed to survive in small numbers on vegetable matter, insects, and worms. Shortly after settlers came to the island, sheep ranching became the principal occupation and vast flocks soon roamed the countryside.

Not waiting for an invitation, the keas went to work on the sheep. As early as 1867 wounds were found in the loins of many sheep of Otago Province and in some cases even the entrails were seen hanging grotesquely from the ripped sides of the abdomen. It took investigators almost a year to discover that a harmless looking parrot was doing all the damage.

The keas lived a lush existence on their unusual diet and they multiplied and extended their depredations to new territories every time a new sheep range was opened. Luckily for the keas, nature lovers soon learned that this carnivorous habit was learned rather than inherited. The parrot was otherwise harmless. To stop the keas New Zealanders paid special attention to sick sheep and immediately removed carcasses from the open range so that the parrots would have less opportunity to acquire their contorted taste.

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Mr. PYM

Mr. Pym didn't like it where he was, in his two-dimension world —so he made a deal with unsuspecting Johnny Wingate

JOHNNY WINGATE, alone in his room, reflected with melancholy sadness that life kept slipping him mickies, one after another, and sometimes in double doses.

"I guess I'm jinxed," Johnny muttered as he pried the cork out of a third bottle of scotch. "If it was anybody else, I wouldn't believe it. Who else could lose his best girl and a good job on the same day? Nobody. Nobody but me."

He poured himself three fingers in the tumbler he was using and added one finger of soda.

"What *else* can happen to me?" Johnny sighed hopelessly as he raised the glass.

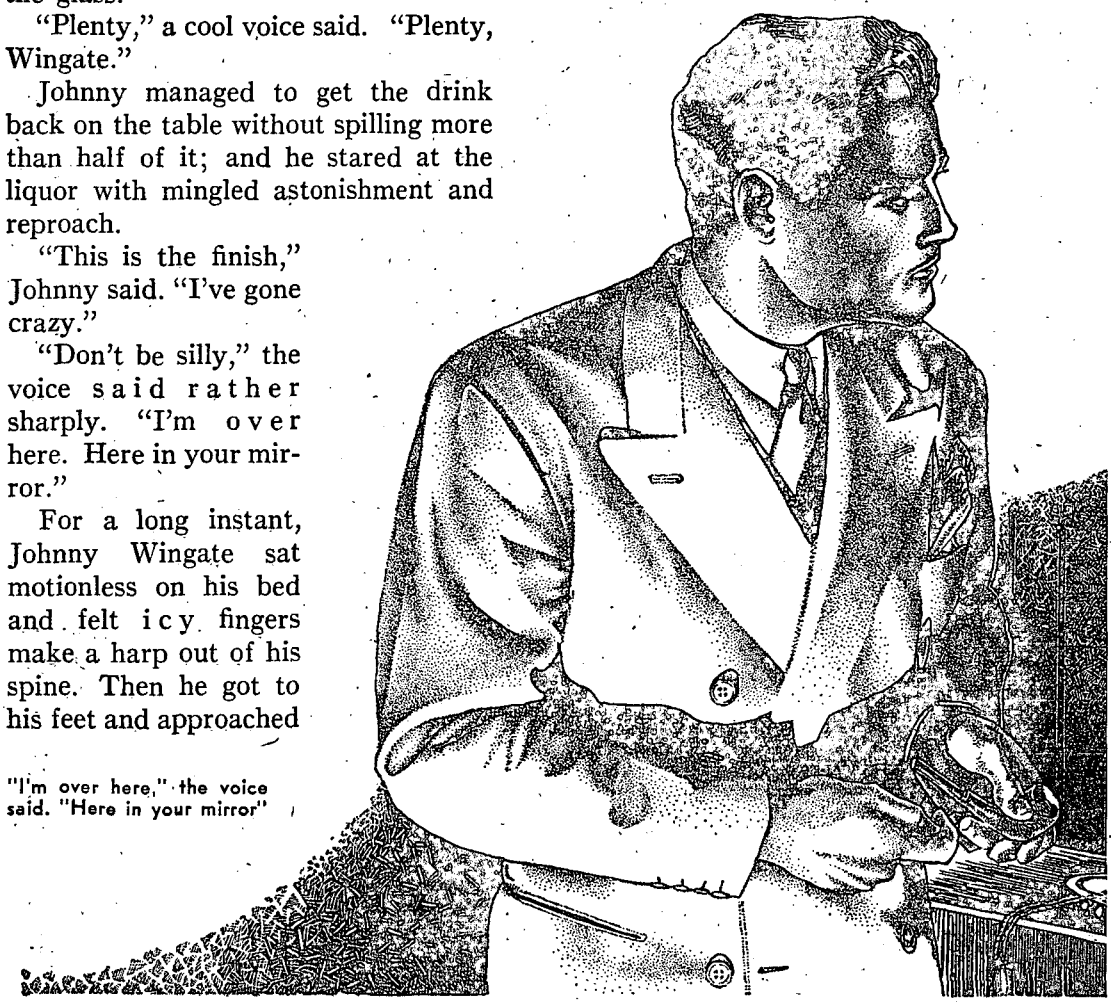
"Plenty," a cool voice said. "Plenty, Wingate."

Johnny managed to get the drink back on the table without spilling more than half of it; and he stared at the liquor with mingled astonishment and reproach.

"This is the finish," Johnny said. "I've gone crazy."

"Don't be silly," the voice said rather sharply. "I'm over here. Here in your mirror."

For a long instant, Johnny Wingate sat motionless on his bed and felt icy fingers make a harp out of his spine. Then he got to his feet and approached



"I'm over here," the voice said. "Here in your mirror"

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MAKES A DEAL

by JOHN BROOME

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the only mirror in the room, a big, old-fashioned glass in a tarnished frame that hung over his bureau.

"Gl-l-urrk . . ." Johnny said incredulously as he looked into the glass. There was a little man in the mirror, a being hardly three feet high with bright, twinkling eyes. He had red, puffy little cheeks, a bristling white moustache, and he was dressed entirely in red with yellow buttons down the front.

"Ahhhh . . ." Johnny said then. Only he didn't really *say* anything; it came up out of his gangling frame like a train whistle.

"Hello, Wingate," the little man beamed. "I'm Mr. Pym. How would you like seven years of uninterrupted good luck?"

"Luck?" Johnny said stupidly.

"Yes, sir," the little man grinned back, "seven years of good luck, Johnny Wingate. You'll get all those things you always wanted; that house in Connecticut, a beautiful wife, a string of fine horses. Everything. And all you've got to do is make a little bargain with me."

Johnny's throat continued to manufacture queer noises, but at last something intelligible emerged.

"A little bargain, Mr.—er—"

"Pym," the little man said. "Mr. Pym. Yes, Johnny, a little bargain, just between you and me."

Johnny frowned, and slowly an awful suspicion arose in him.

"You're not—?" he gulped. "I mean—"

Mr. Pym cocked his head puzzledly in the glass; then a light crossed his bewhiskered, cherubic face.

"The devil? I should say not! What a thought!"

MR. PYM snorted in mild fashion, and Johnny regarding him was forced to admit that the little man looked more like a midget's notion of Santa Claus than any devil. But still—

"Then how do you know those things about me?" Johnny frowned again. "I never told anyone I wanted a house in Connecticut, not even Mary. It was a—a kind of secret."

"Oh, was it?" Mr. Pym's sly smile made two fat cherries out of his cheeks. "Well, I'll tell you something else, something you don't know yourself, Johnny Wingate. That wife I mentioned, her name will be Mary. Interested?"

A slow, sad smile lit up Johnny Wingate's face. Now, of course, he knew he was dreaming. Mary's good-bye letter, with his ring in it, still lay on the bureau. It said Mary was going away to marry someone else, someone named Elwood Dropple. Mrs. Mary Dropple. . . . Johnny tried not to think of it.

"It's very nice of you," Johnny said, "to make me such an offer, Mr.—er—Pym. But now I know I must be asleep and I guess I ought to be in bed. Which is where I'm going, if you'll excuse me."

He turned but the little man stopped him.

"Wait," Mr. Pym said with a tiny frown. "You haven't told me whether you agree to our bargain."

Johnny gave the persistent little Santa Claus in his mirror a wistful grin. Mr. Pym seemed anxious, even eager, to hand him the boon.

"You mean the seven years of good luck?" Johnny murmured. "Sure. Why not? Anything to please."

* The existence of Mr. Pym, a character who is supposed to unexpectedly greet you out of mirrors, is legendary. He dates back to the first glass mirrors used in England in the days when knights were bold. Only when you were off your guard did he appear in your mirror, and usually he had some proposition to make. And beware listening to him! He delighted in getting his victims into trouble, and his suggestions were always offered with that intent.—Ed.

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"Good!" Mr. Pym said. "Fine!" He clapped his small, gloved hands together joyfully. "You won't be sorry, Johnny Wingate. Mark my words. Now I've got to get busy right away. So long."

Mr. Pym waved good-bye. He seemed to melt into the glass right before Johnny's eyes. But a thought struck Johnny just as the little figure was disappearing.

"Wait a second," Johnny called out.

Mr. Pym reappeared promptly. That is, his cherubic face appeared in the mirror with an inquiring look on it. The rest of him could not be seen. It was like watching a conjurer. Johnny gaped ludicrously.

"What is it?" the little man said impatiently.

"Oh, yes," Johnny shook his head dizzily and returned to his thought. "Of course, I know all this isn't real, Mr. Pym. It—it couldn't be. But still I'm curious about something. What happens when the seven years are up?"

"Oh," Mr. Pym chuckled, "that would be telling."

He gave Johnny a sly wink and was gone, this time completely. Only, for a fraction of an instant, his smile seemed to linger on the glass. After that, Johnny was staring blankly into his own lean face. He turned and walked slowly to his bed where he sat down, and an unhappy conviction settled on him.

"Now I know what else can happen to me," Johnny Wingate said dully. "I can get the d.t.'s and I've just had 'em!"

THE next morning brought Johnny Wingate a very heavy head and two letters in the mail. The first was a familiar, violet envelope and Johnny's hand trembled strangely as he ripped it open and scanned the contents.

Mary had written:

"*Dear* Johnny, A terrible thing happened tonight. The police came *and* took Elwood Dropple away. They said Elwood already had *two* other wives in New Jersey. Oh, Johnny, I'm so miserable. *And* I know I loved you all along. Can you—will you ever forgive . . . *your* Mary?"

Johnny reread the last two precious sentences over and over again. It was some time before he got around to the other letter, which was a special delivery from his last employer, J. A. Cobblehead, Inc., Realtors. The note inside said Mr. Cobblehead wanted to see him immediately. That was all. Johnny regarded it puzzledly; then he donned his hat and went.

"AH, young man. Sit down," Mr. Jay A. Cobblehead said when Johnny was ushered into his office. Johnny's former boss was a small man with a massive, bald and wrinkled head. He supported his head with one hand and blinked owlishly over his desk at Johnny.

"Wingate," he said, "it was you who bought us that land development in Montana, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Johnny nodded unhappily. "Opportunity Acres, Mr. Cobblehead. That's why I was fired. You said nobody would live in Montana—especially not under a lake." He winced as he thought of the other things the boss had said at the time.

"But just why did you buy Opportunity Acres, Wingate?" Mr. Cobblehead said in an odd voice. He seemed to be delving after something.

"Well," Johnny said defensively, "it was very cheap. And I thought—that is, I had a feeling . . ." His voice trailed off. After all, why *did* he buy Opportunity Acres? The answer, if there was one, escaped him. Johnny relapsed into a miserable silence.

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"Ah!" Mr. Cobblehead said suddenly with a knowing grin. "I thought so! You had information about the bauxite all along, didn't you, Wingate? Come clean, young man, come clean!"

Johnny's eyebrows flew up.

"Bauxite?"

"Yes. The aluminum ore." Mr. Cobblehead nodded. "Government agents discovered last night that Opportunity may be the largest aluminum deposit in the country. It was a smart move to buy when you did, Wingate, a very smart move. We'd like you to come back to work for us."

Johnny hardly heard the last words.

"Last night?" he frowned.

"Why, yes," Mr. Cobblehead said, "they discovered the bauxite at about three in the morning. I don't know what they were doing there at the time, but they wired us right away. Got me out of bed." He paused "If you're hesitating on account of the salary, Wingate, we're prepared to double your old one. Yes, indeed. A man like you can be mighty valuable in this company."

"Double my old salary?" Johnny held fast to the arms of his chair while the room see-sawed absurdly under him. "Yes, of course, Mr. Cobblehead," he managed to say at last. "Of course I—"

He got no further. For at that moment his eye was caught by something gleaming oddly on Mr. Cobblehead's desk top, something that looked like a tiny, human eye. Johnny stared at it and a slow, numb feeling crept upward from his toes. The eye was plainly winking at him.

"Wingate!" Mr. Cobblehead said in alarm. "You're pale as a ghost. Wingate!" The boss of Cobblehead, Inc. rose to his feet hastily and shouted to his outer office: "Miss Stevens! Somebody! Bring some water, a young man's fainted in here!"

JOHNNY WINGATE didn't see Mr. Pym after that for a long time. In fact, as the years rolled by, Johnny worked hard and, despite his business success, thought less and less about the little man, until finally he forgot Mr. Pym completely. So Mr. Pym's appearance in the railroad car that afternoon came as a distinct surprise. And so did the grinding, screeching, unexpected stop of the train just before it—although Johnny didn't connect the two events until later.

Johnny was coming home early, for today was his and Mary's third wedding anniversary, and he was carrying Mary's gift on the seat beside him, when the train crashed to a halt. Johnny was almost thrown into the aisle, but he recovered himself and sank back into his seat—and blinked hard. For there in the smudged glass of the car window was a small, familiar figure.

"Oh," Johnny said slowly, "it's you."

Mr. Pym looked the same as ever, except that his snow white moustache, his cherry cheeks, and his red suit were rather washed out in the transparent window pane. And he was puffing a little as if he had just exerted himself. But his twinkling smile was undimmed.

"Hello, Johnny," Mr. Pym murmured. "Doing all right, aren't you?" The little man's quick, bright gaze took in Johnny's expensive new suit, the five-dollar tie Mary had bought him, and the fresh flower in Johnny's buttonhole.

"Yes sir!" Mr. Pym beamed. "I told you you'd get all the things you wanted, didn't I? And you'll get more. You can't miss with me behind you, my boy, you just can't miss!"

The little man seemed to get a possessive pride in regarding Johnny, and it made Johnny vaguely uncomfortable. He threw a quick glance around him

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but the train was empty. The other three passengers in his car had already gone forward to see what had made the train stop like that.

"I don't think you ought to go to so much trouble on my account, Mr.—er—Pym," Johnny said uncertainly.

"Oh," Mr. Pym said with raised brows, "it's no trouble at all, Johnny. I'm glad to keep my share of the bargain."

But, as he was speaking, a peculiar thing was happening to Mr. Pym. The little man began to flicker, like an old fashioned movie. He was on the window pane . . . then suddenly he wasn't . . . then he was . . . then he wasn't . . . Johnny watched the antics in amazement; Mr. Pym kept talking unconcerned and added a word each time he appeared. But a train was clattering by at the moment and Johnny only caught:

". . . my . . . share . . . of . . . the . . . bar . . . gain. . . . "

THEN the train screamed past and Mr. Pym stopped his flickering. He stood in the window and mopped his brow with a tiny, silk handkerchief.

"Whew!" Mr. Pym said. "I shouldn't ride on trains. Reflections, you know."

"Reflections?" Johnny stared.

"Yes," the little man blew in a breath, "a second dimensional being like me is always getting reflected. It was the windows of that passing train this time."

"Ohhh . . ." Johnny's voice was strained. "Second dimensional!"

"Yes. Didn't you know?" Mr. Pym said surprised. "I'm of the second dimension. It's rather a nuisance being reflected that way, but I'm not complaining. After all, when you get used to it, I suppose one dimension is as good as another, eh?"

He gave Johnny an oddly pointed smile. Johnny blinked uneasily. He had the feeling there was something behind Mr. Pym's whimsical remark. And besides there was something bothering Johnny. But Mr. Pym gave him no time to voice it.

"Well, take care of yourself," Mr. Pym said abruptly. "I can't watch over you every minute, you know. And—remember our bargain!"

"But wait!" Johnny tried to stop him. "What is that bargain?"

He was too late; Mr. Pym was gone. Johnny caught a swift glimpse of the tiny, red shape shooting out from the window pane to a shining rail below, where Mr. Pym became queerly long and thin, and flashed out of sight an instant later. Johnny drew a long and worried breath just as the car conductor came up the aisle.

"Ticket, please."

Johnny complied and realized that the train was not yet moving.

"When are we going to start, conductor? I'm very late already."

"Late!" The conductor sniffed. "You ought to be thankful you're still alive, young man. There was a switch out around the bend, and the engineer just stopped in time or we'd all been killed!"

"A switch out?" Johnny said puzzledly.

"Yessir. If you ask me, it's a plain miracle we ain't all dead. Engineer says he saw a red light up the track and that's why he stopped. But there ain't no lantern or signal there now. There ain't nothing there, young man!"

"A red light?" Johnny said. "A red light on the track?"

"Yep," the conductor said. "A red light that wasn't there." He wagged his head solemnly at Johnny and passed up the aisle. Johnny sat back and ran a hand over his forehead. He was sweating. So *that* was what the little man meant by "watching over him."

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"Mr. Pym," Johnny whispered. "He flagged down the train!"

JUST what was Mr. Pym after? That was the question in Johnny Wingate's mind as he rode from the station. You get nothing for nothing, the old phrase goes; and Johnny uneasily sensed its truth. He reached his home without being able to throw off the persistent feeling that something unpleasant awaited him when Mr. Pym's "bargain" expired.

"Mary, will you do me a favor?" Johnny spoke suddenly across the table.

Dinner was over, and the maid had cleared the dishes into the kitchen. Mary looked up in surprise.

"Why, of course, dear," she said.

"That mirror, there," Johnny indicated the elegant glass that hung in their dining room. "Let's have it put down in the cellar. And let's put all our other mirrors down there too."

"Johnny!" Mary was astonished. "Whatever for?"

Johnny ran a hand through his hair and blinked. He had never told Mary about Mr. Pym; and somehow he couldn't now.

"It's a feeling I've got," he said. "I know mirrors are unlucky for me."

Mary gave her husband a slow, searching glance. There was something troubling Johnny, she could tell. But she said nothing.

"Certainly, dear. Whatever you say," she nodded. "I'll have it done first thing in the morning."

AFTER that, Johnny got into the habit of avoiding mirrors and other shiny surfaces. As a full-fledged partner in the new firm of Cobblehead and Wingate, America's foremost realtors, Johnny put through an order banning all mirrors from the offices. He even had special non-glare glass installed in all the doors and windows.

"That ought to stop Mr. Pym," Johnny told himself rather pridefully. "And maybe he'll get discouraged and forget all about that old bargain."

But he was mistaken. For when it came to cleverness Mr. Pym could run rings around Johnny any day or night. Johnny didn't suspect a thing when he came home that Saturday afternoon. The day was full of sunshine and Johnny hadn't seen hide nor whiskers of Mr. Pym for a long, long while. In fact, he had forgotten the little man again. He whistled cheerily as he walked up the flower-bordered path to his house. Just looking at his big, white house, and picturing Mary in it, was enough to make Johnny whistle.

But a moment later, inside, he stopped whistling and stared at the strange mirror that was leaning against his living room wall. It was a huge, expensive affair in a heavy frame, and it must have taken four men to carry it. Mary appeared while he was frowning at it.

"Where did this come from?" Johnny asked.

Mary looked puzzled.

"Why, you sent it, didn't you, Johnny? It arrived this morning, all paid for."

"I never saw it before," Johnny said.

Mary was disappointed.

"I thought you'd gotten all over that old superstition of yours, Johnny Wingate. I thought this was a lovely anniversary present for me."

"Anniversary?" Johnny started as if he half-remembered somthing else.

"I guess our honeymoon is over," Mary smiled gently. "You've forgotten that tomorrow we're married seven years, Johnny."

Johnny sat down. He remembered now. Tonight was seven years since he had first seen Mr. Pym. He should

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have known where that mirror came from right away! There was a hollow feeling in Johnny that he wasn't going to escape the ingenious Mr. Pym. If he got rid of the huge mirror, the little man would find another way to reach him. And suddenly Johnny realized that he didn't want to escape Mr. Pym. It was better to have the whole thing out tonight.

He looked up to find Mary staring at him with some concern.

"What's wrong, Johnny?" Mary asked. "If it's this mirror—why, we can send it back."

"Wrong? Nothing's wrong, dear," Johnny said too loudly. He essayed a smile. "And let's keep the mirror. It's really very nice. The man who picked it out—" he coughed—"obviously knows a lot about mirrors."

THAT afternoon, Mary went to their neighbors, the Spyvven-Tupps, for tea. Johnny pleaded some business matters and stayed home. He visited his stables and petted the horses for a while. The animals pricked up their ears at their master's approach. Then Johnny watered the flower boxes around the house and sprinkled the lawn. Finally, he couldn't think of anything else to do, so he walked into the house and glanced into the big mirror. Mr. Pym was already there.

The little man's ruby-red face lit up at sight of Johnny. Mr. Pym's scarlet suit and its yellow buttons gleamed splendidly in the new mirror. And you could have seen his white moustache a mile off. He and Johnny stared at each other for a moment; then Mr. Pym rubbed his nattily gloved hands together.

"Well, Johnny," Mr. Pym said rather briskly. "The time has come and all that, eh? I hope you're ready. I don't want this to be unpleasant. It's much nicer to do things pleasantly, isn't it?"

Johnny frowned.

"You don't want *what* to be unpleasant?" he said.

"Can't you guess?" Mr. Pym smiled. He paused: "Let's put it this way, Johnny: if you were in the second dimension like me, what would you want most?"

"I—I can't imagine," Johnny said.

"Sure you can!" Mr. Pym said. "Why, the one thing you'd want most would be—a body. I mean a real body, Johnny, not one that bounces all over the place like a sunbeam. Yes, sir! You'd get mighty sick of bouncing around."

Johnny's frown deepened.

"But I don't know of any bodies," he said slowly. "At least not any loose ones. I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to help—"

"Oh," Mr. Pym cut in with a grin, "I'm not looking for a loose body—as you put it, Johnny. Yours will suit me fine. I've had my eye on it for some time; and I might say I wouldn't want a better one."

The little man's eyes had the same satisfied, possessive gleam in them that Johnny had noticed once before.

"My . . . body?" Johnny faltered. He felt goose pimples break out all over the item in question; and unconsciously he wrapped his arms around himself.

"Certainly," Mr. Pym declared. "I haven't the right to any other. Our bargain gives me the right to yours. Tonight, when the seven years are over, you and I are going to change places, Johnny, and please—" the little man cautioned— "no unpleasantness, eh?"

Johnny was hugging himself so tight that he had to let up in order to breathe. When he did take a breath, it was a whopper.

"Change places?" he said. "You and I? That's—ridiculous! It's—

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it's—" He couldn't get any more out.

"Oh, is it?" Mr. Pym said with a keen glance. "Perhaps, you'd like me to show you how we'll do it?" He paused and suddenly in a very sharp, clear voice said:

"Look at me, Johnny."

JOHNNY in surprise obeyed. He found himself looking straight into Mr. Pym's eyes, which were gleaming oddly. And the next thing that happened, the awful thing, Johnny could never afterward explain or even describe. For Mr. Pym's brilliant gaze seemed to reach into Johnny and sort of scoop him to the surface. It was like getting a big tooth pulled; only there wasn't any pain. The drawing, tingling sensation was a hundred times more awful. Johnny felt himself, the core of him, the part of him that *was* Johnny Wingate, rising in his body and starting to get away through his eyes. He couldn't move; and he couldn't tear his gaze away.

Mr. Pym released him just in time by blinking deliberately. *Johnny Wingate* snapped back into Johnny with a *spang!* The little man looked at him with a grin.

"I could have had you then," Mr. Pym sighed a little regretfully, "and I could have had you other times, Johnny. But I like to do things right, with no unpleasantness. I don't want you haunting me in mirrors after I'm Johnny Wingate and you're *vice versa*. No, we've got a bargain and we'll stick to it, eh?"

Johnny stared at him dumbly. Mr. Pym rubbed his hands together and smiled in anticipation.

"Tonight," he told Johnny, "at twelve o'clock when the bargain ends. I'll expect you down here. And don't try anything foolish, like running away, I mean. It won't do you any good. Not the least bit of good, Johnny!"

"SOMETHING *is* wrong," Mary insisted. "I know it."

Johnny's wife had come home to find Johnny perambulating aimlessly about the house, his hands deep in his pockets, and a look on his face as if he'd lost something but couldn't remember what it was.

"What is it?" Mary said. She pulled Johnny out to the sun porch and made him sit in a rocker beside her. A sinking, fiery sun made long shadows in the green and brown valley that lay before Johnny's house.

"I suppose," Johny said after a while, "I've got to tell you about Mr. Pym."

Whereupon, he drew his rocker closer and took one of Mary's hands; and told her all about Mr. Pym and the bargain he had made with the little man. He started with Mr. Pym's first visit in his room seven years ago, and worked up to his last one that afternoon while Mary was away. He didn't leave out a thing. Mary listened with astonishment at first; then with some anxiety; and finally, when Johnny was finished, she sat very quiet.

"And the seven years of good luck ends tonight, Johnny?" she said after a moment.

"At twelve o'clock," Johnny nodded. "And then it becomes very bad. I wish I knew what to do."

"Well, I can tell you one thing you're not going to do, Johnny Wingate," Mary said. "You're not going to change places with that horrible little man. Do you hear? I won't stand for it. I'm your wife and I married you. And I don't care two pins about any old bargain."

There was no mistaking the tone of Mary's voice. Johnny knew his wife could be very firm when she chose to be.

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"Yes, dear," he said meekly. But he still didn't know how he was going to escape Mr. Pym.

AFTER supper, Johnny lit a pipe, and took his wife's arm, and together they walked in the big apple orchard that stretched behind their house. But the cool, night air brought neither of them inspiration. Mary vetoed as impractical Johnny's desperate suggestions that he live in a cave, or go around with his eyes closed. And Johnny told his wife that he simply could not outstare Mr. Pym or hypnotize him, or anything of the sort. After a while they both fell silent and continued to trample the dead leaves underfoot. Finally Mary stopped.

"Johnny," she said, "you remember you told me about Mr. Pym on that train four years ago? I mean how he flickered that way because he was easily reflected?"

"Yes?" Johnny said.

"Well," Mary frowned, "maybe we could do something with that idea."

"Maybe," Johnny admitted dubiously. "What?"

"I don't know exactly," Mary said. "But it seems to me if he gets reflected so easily, why . . . maybe we could sort of reflect him a long way off . . . get him where he can't come back, Johnny."

Johnny shook his head.

"No good, Mary. Wherever he's reflected to, he can bounce right back. I suppose it's—er—one of the advantages of the second dimension."

Dispiritedly, the young pair turned their footsteps toward home. It was quite late and in the blackness above Johnny's house thousands of stars were twinkling. Johnny's big white house looked very lovely under the stars; but looking at it brought Johnny no pleasure, as it had on previous occasions. It might not be his after tonight. He and Mary walked slowly and reluctantly toward the house. But this time it was Johnny who stopped.

"Say!" he said suddenly. "Maybe we can do something with your idea, Mary. I mean getting him where he can't bounce back."

He scratched his head and rubbed his chin while Mary watched him anxiously.

"It's a chance," Johnny said. "A chance. Mary, have I got a—"

He leaned close to his wife and whispered as if he were afraid Mr. Pym might be close by listening. Mary looked puzzled by Johnny's query; but she answered it in the affirmative.

"I'm sure," she said. "It's in the house somewhere. You haven't used it in years. But I know I can find it."

"Good," Johnny said. He felt in slightly better spirits as he took Mary's arm again. At least, now he had a chance, a fighting chance against Mr. Pym.

"It's a long shot, Mary," Johnny told his wife as they walked up to their house, "—a very long shot. But if it works Mr. Pym will be in for the surprise of his—er—second dimensional life."

"I'M GLAD to see you're ready, Johnny," Mr. Pym said approvingly. "You're being very sensible."

The little man had appeared promptly, as the mantelpiece clock struck twelve, in the new mirror, in the living room. His satisfied gaze took in the picture of Johnny sitting resignedly in a big armchair in front of the mirror. One of Johnny's elbows was resting carelessly on an arm of the chair.

"But just a minute," Johnny said slowly. "I'm not ready. As a matter of fact, I've decided our bargain is—er—null and void, Mr. Pym."

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"Really!" Mr. Pym said with an air of mild surprise. "And for what reason may I ask?"

"It's not binding, and I don't have to keep it," Johnny said, "because I didn't know the terms. That's United States law; I looked it up this evening."

"Mmm!" Mr. Pym pursed his lips ironically and whisked a hand past his moustache. "But you're wrong there, Johnny: we didn't make our bargain according to United States law. No, sir. It's a strictly legal bargain according to second dimensional law. You'll have to take my word for that—er—until later."

Johnny blinked and frowned. He didn't want to play his ace card unless he was forced to; after all, Mr. Pym might be able to trump it. Besides, Johnny had one other card yet to play.

"Well, even if it's binding," he told Mr. Pym, "I can't keep the bargain for another reason."

"And what is *that?*" Mr. Pym's patience was becoming frayed around the edges.

"Well, I made another bargain seven years ago," Johnny said, "a bargain with Mary, that was a—a kind of sacred bargain. And I'd be breaking it if I—"

"You're beating around the bush, Johnny!" Mr. Pym's tiny eyes flashed brilliantly and angrily. "Those arguments are only wasting time. I'd advise you not to struggle now; it will be easier for you." The little man drew himself up and seemed to grow inches taller in the glass.

"Johnny Wingate!" Mr. Pym said suddenly. "Look at me!"

But Johnny was just a split second ahead of him this time. Before the terrible compulsion of Mr. Pym's words reached him, Johnny had dropped his hand under his chair, and brought up a small, squarish black box. With the same movement, Johnny looked down at the box, directed it at the mirror, and pressed a tiny lever.

WHAT followed surprised even Johnny; and he had half-hoped something of the sort would happen. As Johnny pressed the lever, the little man's fierce arrogance disappeared, and an expression of almost comical astonishment took its place. Simultaneously, Mr. Pym began to do strange things in the mirror; his arms flailed wildly about him; and he seemed to be clawing the second dimensional air around him in order to get a grip on something. But he couldn't. And suddenly Mr. Pym shot out of the mirror toward Johnny.

There was a blurred flash of red and yellow between box and mirror; then a hollow *popping!* sound. Johnny flicked the lever up hastily, gulped, and drew in a long, relieved breath. Mr. Pym was trapped! He held the box gingerly in both hands and started to place it on the table in the living room.

"Johnny!" A thin, terrified voice emerged from the box. "Johnny, where am I? Let me out!"

Johnny almost dropped the box; he caught it just in time.

"Why, you're in my camera, Mr. Pym," he replied to the voice. "I had a hunch that a camera lens was one place you couldn't bounce back from—not if I snapped the shutter closed in time."

"Camera!" the sound was a squawk. "That's why I'm getting stuck! Johnny, let me out! I'll do anything you say! Anything, Johnny!"

The imploring note in Mr. Pym's voice made Johnny frown troubledly. He hadn't counted on the little man being able to address him from inside the camera. In fact, he hadn't thought about what might happen afterwards

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at all. It seemed to put a new face on the situation.

"Well, Mr. Pym," Johnny said slowly, "I will let you out on one condition: that you go away and never bother Mary or me again. Will you promise that?"

"Yes, Johnny! I swear it! Only let me out of here!" Mr. Pym's voice was growing fainter and fainter.

"All right," Johnny said. He pointed the camera back at the mirror and opened the shutter. After a moment, there was another *pop!*, a low one, and an instant later Mr. Pym was back on the glass, his cherry cheeks puffing hard, and his hands roaming over his three foot length anxiously. He was quite intact, though.

"Well, good-by, Mr. Pym," Johnny said. "You did a lot for me and of course I'm very grateful. But I guess you see now that our bargain was a mistake from—"

JOHNNY broke off. Mr. Pym was regarding him oddly, intently, significantly. A horrified realization swelled up in Johnny; he tried to drop his gaze. He couldn't. He tried to bring up his arm, the one that was holding the camera; but he couldn't do that either. He couldn't do anything except look into Mr. Pym's maliciously bright eyes.

"Too bad it had to be unpleasant, Johnny," he heard Mr. Pym say as from far. "Too bad. . . ."

Mr. Pym's brows beetled in business-like fashion; the intensity of his gaze burned Johnny. And once more, *Johnny Wingate* began to precipitate out of Johnny's body. Again, Johnny felt that small core of him rising to his eyes, sucked up by the unearthly power in Mr. Pym's brilliant gaze.

"This time I'm a goner!" the unhappy conviction pressed itself on Johnny. He fought. He struggled with every ounce of will in him to break the terrible compulsion; but it was no use. Little by little, he was losing the battle; inch by inch, he was losing his hold on his own body. And then just as he was about to give up the unequal tug-of-war—

"Snap!"

The clicking noise came from the right of Johnny, a few feet to one side; and it wasn't a moment too soon. The sound, whatever it was, broke Mr. Pym's spell over him sharply. *Johnny Wingate* jumped back inside Johnny with an almost joyful eagerness. Johnny staggered, lost his footing, and sat down very heavily right on the living room floor. It was from that awkward position that he saw dazedly what had saved him.

It was Mary. His wife was holding another camera; and she had it trained on Mr. Pym in the mirror. Johnny saw the little man make new, frantic efforts to escape the gleaming lens of the camera. But Mary had it pointed at him with deadly precision. Suddenly, there was a swish of scarlet across the room, a loud, protesting *pop!* and Mr. Pym disappeared. Mary closed the shutter quickly and hard.

"Here," she handed the camera over to Johnny, "I borrowed this from Mrs. Spyvven-Tupps—just in case . . . Oh, Johnny!" And with that Mary was in her husband's arms.

Johnny held Mary with one hand and the camera with the other. Of the two, the latter claimed his attention. Just what was he to do with it? There was no sound from the camera; either Mr. Pym was playing 'possum, or he had gotten 'stuck' good. Johnny frowned and wondered what the little man had meant by "getting stuck." Mary was having a good cry; so Johnny settled back and thought about the matter. And after a while, his face brightened.

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"WHO on earth is *that?*" Mrs. Spyvven-Tupps said raising her lorgnette. She was having afternoon tea with Mary at Mary's house; and her gaze was directed at the Wingates' mantelpiece.

"That?" Mary smiled and followed the glance of her guest. "Why, that's an old acquaintance of Johnny's, Mrs. Spyvven-Tupps. A very old acquaintance, but you never met him—er—I'm sure."

"Mm, what an odd creature!" Mrs. Spyvven-Tupps murmured; and she got up and looked closer at the photograph which rested on the mantelpiece.

The photograph was in an elegant frame, eight inches by five; and it contained the picture of a strange gentlemen with white whiskers, in a red suit with yellow buttons down the front. The gentleman was aptly described as "odd"; but more odd still was the expression on the gentleman's face. That was one of surprise, of very great surprise. He seemed to have been snapped at a moment of genuine astonishment.

". . . as if," Mrs. Spyvven-Tupps told her husband that night at supper, "as if the man had never had his picture taken before!"

"'m 'sure, my dear," Mr. Spyvven-Tupps murmured absently. "Please pass the olives."

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 7)

IT seems that you can do almost anything from the air these days. Captain H. H. Holloway, TWA stratoliner pilot flying his route from Los Angeles to Albuquerque has become quite an underground explorer! From his plane he has located a set of caverns that may be larger and finer than the Carlsbad caverns, or Mammoth Cave. But even more amazing is the cause of these caves.

METEOR CRATER is right in the vicinity, and these caves were caused by no less than 38 other giant meteorites (probably part of the same fall as Meteor Crater's huge ten-million-ton occupant) which fell and collapsed the rock of a huge pit far down in the earth. It was these craters that Hollaway saw.

AN expedition and exploration now being made is seeking an entrance to these caves. The rock in the vicinity is triassic limestone, and well over a million years old, says Dr. Harvey H. Nininger.

WHICH is all very interesting, but the good doctor makes another statement which has to do with meteoric fall other than Meteor Crater. He says: "Approximately 50,000 tons of meteoric material fall to the earth every 24 hours."

YOUR editor is a curious person. He likes to doodle. And this time his pencil brings up these astounding figures: A. That means 18,250,000 tons are added to the Earth's mass every year. B. Since the time those limestone formations were laid down, the Earth has grown in bulk by eighteen and a quarter *trillion* tons. C. The age of the Earth is rather in doubt, but to strike a happy medium between theories, about 333 trillion years would *double* the mass of the Earth. (In case you're wondering, the Earth weighs 6,592,000,000,000,000,000,000 tons, minus atmosphere.) And a mere quadrillion years would make it three times its present mass.

A, B, C, we don't believe it! Doctor Nuninger is just guessing, we think. Most of the meteorites we see (and even during so-called "showers" they average less than 50 per hour) are only tiny grains of sand, no larger than a pinhead, or at the most, a small pea.

IF so much falls every hour, we can't blame the street-cleaning department for not keeping the streets clean. In fact, we wonder how they keep their heads above meteoric debris!

AS you read this, there is a new treat waiting for you. All you have to do is go to your nearest newsstand and mutter the mystic words *Mammoth Detective,* and into your hands will be placed a treasure-house of the finest detective fiction entertainment being put together in one pulp magazine today. Personally, we don't remember having seen a detective magazine with 320 pages before. However, your favorite fantasy magazine, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES now has a new brother in the Ziff-Davis family, and it isn't just family loyalty that leads her to introduce the new baby—the book is something you can't afford to miss—and you'd be sore at us if we forgot tell you about it. So take our word for it, and don't miss it. Get it right now, while there's a copy left.

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JUST as a hint, it contains a full-length novel by Wyndham Martyn, who turns out some very fine detective fiction indeed. Author of many novels, especially around Anthony Trent, the well-known character. It's a thrill a minute novel—and lordy, how many minutes there are in it!

THEN there are a raft of other stories, including a couple of crackerjacks by your own favorite authors, William P. McGivern, and David Wright O'Brien, and Nelson S. Bond. We recommend "Secret of the Goldfish Bowl," "Mind Over Murder" and "Murder Makes the Kingrow" as tops in mystery entertainment.

ALTOGETHER, there's 174,000 words of fiction alone—and you can add to that 26,000 words of features and articles and departments: It's chuck full of a variety of things. True crime stories, the lowdown on fingerprinting, criminals wanted by the FBI, missing persons, a reader's department, personals, correspondence corner, a department such as this one, where the editor reads the mystery blotter with his magic mirror and gives you the lowdown on everything that crosses his desk. Oh, there are more things about this book than we have space to mention here. Best thing for you to do is just hike out and get a copy, and find out for yourself how swell our new baby is!

BEFORE we leave the subject, though, we might mention that Julian S. Krupa does the back cover in full color. You fans who like the work of the master—here's another one for your collection!

WE suppose you'll call it highway robbery, but our sister magazine *Amazing Stories* features a Mac Girl this month on the cover. It's to illustrate "Lord of the Crystal Bow" by Duncan Farnsworth, another of your favorite authors. Here's another bargain for you. 276 pages, 13 great stories (by such authors as Stanton A. Coblentz, Nelson S. Bond, John Russell Fearn, Polton Cross, Thornton Ayre, A. R. McKenzie, John York Cabot, Robert Moore Williams, and many others) and no less than 16 features! If you've got any hours to while away after reading that one, you've got a time machine around the house!

SPEAKING of artists, perhaps the two men, or two men and a woman, who are receiving more fan mail than usual, are Ned Hadley, and the Magarians.

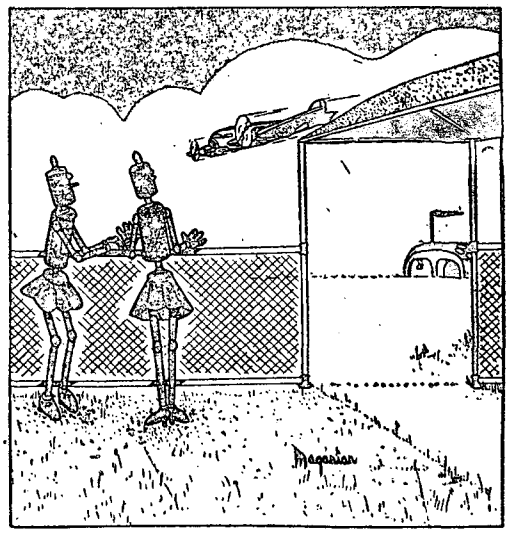
Ned Hadley has one in this issue which is typical of his recent good work. It's the illustration for "Daughter of the Snake God" on page 8-9. We think you'll like this one, and we expect that Mr. Hadley, who has learned amazingly fast, will become one of your highly-regarded favorites of all time.

THE Magarians are turning out some fine work recently, one example of which is the illustration for the Magic Flute story beginning on page 178, and another fine example in "Mademoiselle Butterfly" on page 146-7. However, we have on hand a series of illustrations which we can hardly wait to publish, because we know that you'll go for them in a big way.

WE have some exciting news for you, and it is directly in response to your requests over a period of nearly two years. We are returning to the policy of a full-color back cover on FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. And your favorite back-cover artist, Frank R. Paul, will do them for you. The subject matter of the series we'll keep a secret for another month, but we'll give you more information as soon as they are under way. Watch for the announcement of the first of the series.

QUITE unexpectedly the other day Robert Moore Williams dropped in on us for coffee, all the way from St. Louis. We were distinctly flattered. Said Bob: "I notice these big books of yours, and I figure the readers are getting something special, so I want to know a few things about how to give 'em even better stories. A big book like FA reserves some extra work."

WELL, readers, when a writer has his readers that firmly in mind, you can bet that you are all in for some mighty fine fiction in the future from him. He talked over several stories he had in mind, and we just want you to keep your eye peeled for his name on the contents page. It'll mean "here's a dandy." *Rap.*



"I'm in love with the automatic pilot."

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The dwarf picked up a ball and hurled it—

Gather 'Round the Flowing Bowler

by Robert Bloch

Lefty Feep had a great idea: why not get the world's most experienced bowler, the Catskill dwarf, to challenge the champs!

—The ball hit the pins with a crash like thunder!

I WAS sitting in my usual seat at Jack's place the other night when I was startled out of it. I literally began to rise and show the shine on my trousers.

"Hey, there!" I called.

A gangling figure paused midway between tables and veered rapidly in the direction of my booth. With a melancholy grin, Mr. Lefty Feep sidled over and extended a dripping hand.

"You been carrying a herring?" I inquired. "Your hand is wet."

"I am all wet," said Lefty Feep. "And I like it."

It was true. Lefty Feep was all wet. For the first time I permitted my gaze to run along the rainbow of his suit. Feep was wearing a box-shoulder Navajo blanket pattern of such blinding hue that at first I thought somebody had spilled spaghetti on him.

But it was not spaghetti that poured from his lapels and cuffs. It was water. Lefty Feep was soaked to the skin.

"Have you been out in the rain?" I ventured.

"You win the $32 question, friend," said Feep. "I am strolling in a storm this last hour. Outside it is mostly moistly."

"But you'll ruin your clothes," I said —as if it were possible to ruin that atrocious costume.

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"So I buy another suit," Feep grinned, sitting down. "You will pardon me if I seem to drip."

"I never knew you liked water."

"I am extremely fond of water—for external use only. Why, it is water that brings me my fortune this last year."

"Your fortune?" I echoed. Then I regretted it.

For the last time I'd met Lefty Feep he was introduced to me as the biggest liar in seven states. The story he told then more than qualified him for that honor. It dealt, as I remember, with Mr. Feep's accidental visit to the bowling dwarfs of the Catskill Mountains. Feep claimed to have followed the footsteps of Rip Van Winkle by drinking the dwarf's brew and sleeping twenty years into the future. He explained his return by claiming he'd bribed the dwarfs to send him back—by building for them a regulation bowling alley on the mountain top.*

When Feep had unfolded this slightly incredible saga there had been a curious glint in his eye. I saw it now, as I mentioned his fortune.

"Fortune?" he murmured. "Friend, I have adventures in the last annum that will make your blood run from zero below. I have experiences that will make icebergs out of your corpuscles. Doubtless you wish to catch the details?"

"No," I grated.

"Well, if you insist—" said Lefty Feep.

AT FIRST I think I am lucky last year when I do not run into pneumonia. Then something worse happens to me—I run into Gorilla Gabface.

Gorilla Gabface, I believe I mention before, is quite a lusty shout in the old rackets, and he and I are what you might call unfriendly enemies for many the year. We are always making sociable wagers on such matters as who will win the pennant, or what bank will be held up next, and such matters of sporting interest.

Gorilla hangs out in a pool room night and day, in fact I never know him to leave this cue casino in all his unnatural life. I even state the fact that he would not stick his neck out the door if there was a ten-pound cheese on the sidewalk. And this should be quite a temptation, because he is a rat.

So I am quite naturally confused when I see him this night walking down the old stem. He is bouncing along like a bad check, and almost runs me off the sidewalk.

What crooked parole board lets you out? I naturally inquire.

He blinks at me and sticks out his paw. I do not take it, because there is a ring on my own hand which I value.

"I am on my way to the bowling alleys," he cracks.

I just stare. "Bowling alleys? I never hear you are a sports-lover."

He gives a laugh. "There is a lot those big floppy ears of yours never hear, Feep. But it may interest you to know that I am now manager and owner of none other than Yank Albino, the world's champion pin-punisher. Tonight we are holding an exhibition match with Ed Knight, and I am on my way down to take charge of the box office receipts." He laughs, and several persons look around to see if a hyena is loose. "I am making myself some pin money, you might say."

What I might say I say under my breath. It grieves me extremely to see this Gorilla muscling in on something like the bowling game, which is a line I am personally fond of. I figure it a

* Time Wounds All Heels," April 1942 issue of *Fantastic Adventures*.—Ed.

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nice clean sport, and do not approve of putting vaseline on bowling balls, or plugging up the finger-holes with cork, or otherwise bollixing the works. But if Gorilla Gabface is operating, it will sooner or later be too bad for the bowling game. How he gets hold of a champion like Yank Albino I do not figure out. So I ask him.

"SIMPLE," he says. "Albino owes me a number of yards on a little bet, so I take over his contract and he will work it out. Right now I am figuring a few neat deals. "You know," he says, "the bowling game is so clean it hurts me to look at it. Give me a few months with this champion and I will put over so many angles that it will take a cross-eyed accountant ten years to untangle the mess." And he laughs again, causing several people to run home and hide under their beds.

But I do not say anything, and when he asks me if I want to come along and place my peepers on the exhibition matches, I make with the feet to the bowling alleys and take a seat.

This Yank Albino is indeed a sweet bowler, and when I grab a place in the crowd watching I am soon exhibiting my pleasure by uttering such sounds as "Wow!" and "Atta baby!"

All at once I hear a voice at my side contradicting me in such a manner as "Boo! Take him away! He stinks!"

This more than surprises me, particularly since the voice comes out of the mouth of a very pretty ginch. This ginch is just a little thing with long 18-karat hair, but she has a very loud voice, and she keeps up with her "Boo! Throw him out!" even when I stare at her. So naturally I inquire, "Why, ginch, do you make like a censor? Is it the bowling, or do you have a grudge against Yank Albino?"

She gives me a stare and then she starts to bawl. "Boo hoo!" she yammers. "Yank Albino is my fiance. Boo hoo!"

Naturally I do not catch, and tell her so. If Yank Albino is her fiance she should be happy to scramble with such a champion instead of hollering out in public that he is a menace to the nose.

"You do not understand," she tells me. "I don't want people to like Yank's bowling. Because if he becomes unpopular, then maybe his manager will break his contract. I want this to happen, because I know his manager is no better than a thug, and he has got Yank tied up on account of debts and is making some crooked plans for him. I tell Yank this, but he won't believe me, and he refuses to bowl badly. I don't know what to do."

"Leave it to me," I advise. "I have a few ideas I wish to talk over with Mr. Gabface."

She gives a little jump. "Oh, you know Yank's manager, too?" she asks. I wink.

"I know him like a book," I tell her. "Even better, because I am not acquainted with any books except racing. I think I have me an idea which will make you happy and me money."

"What is it?" she pipes, cheering up a little and giving me a smile that would go good in advertising love-seats anywhere.

"I think I can find a bowler to beat your Yank Albino," I say. "In fact I will wager with Gorilla that I find such a character. Then when he beats Yank I will win the bet and Gorilla will get mad and release his contract."

"You are crazy," sobs the ginch. "Nobody can beat my Yank."

I smile.

THEN I run down to the box office and catch Gorilla Gabface. I tell him what I tell the ginch, or at least

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part of it—that I am willing to lay a grand on a bowling match against Yank Albino if I can provide another champion.

"Who is he?" asks Gabface. "Albino already beats every bowler in all leagues."

"My man is called the Masked Marvel," I tell him.

"You are making a bad bet," chuckles Goldfarb.

I dig into my pocket. "Here is the alphabet for you—one G that says my Masked Marvel will beat Yank Albino in an exhibition match, any date after April 30th."

"Why after April 30th?" he asks.

"I got to go get him," I answer. "He lives outside the city. Way outside."

"How about May 1st?" says Gabface. "We got a date open."

"Pretty quick, but it's ok with me," I agree.

Gabface takes the money and laughs again. "I still say that no human being can beat Yank Albino," he gurgles.

I answer, but under my breath. "I didn't say he would be a human being," I whisper.

DRUNK and early on the morning of April 30th, I slip out of my pajamas and into a Manhattan. I grab me a flask and make for the car, heading up the Hudson valley and cutting west.

From time to time I take a slug from the flask, because I am looking forward to a tough time.

Pretty soon I am in Catskill country, on my fourth side road and my fifth drink. I am climbing up, and I figure I might as well be as high as the scenery.

The old bus clunks along pretty steady, but I am doing the shivering. Particularly when I get off on the last side road, which is so deserted there aren't even any hot-dog stands.

I am driving all alone up steep hills covered with trees so they look like a bunch of Smith Brothers' faces without a shave. To make the resemblance complete, it is so quiet you can hear a cough drop.

Then it isn't so quiet any more. Far off in the distance there is a low, rumbling sound — like Gorilla Gabface makes after a heavy meal.

I climb higher, it gets darker, and the noise is louder. In spite of myself I begin making like a goose with the flesh. Here I am, all alone in the Catskills, without any weapon but my flask.

By the time I rise over the top of the highest hill, the rumbling is strictly from thunder. A minute later I know I have arrived. Because there is the sign on the rocks at the end of the deserted road.

ANNUAL PICNIC
THE DIMINUTIVE SOCIETY
OF THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS

I am back with the dwarfs I meet last year, and, sure enough, up ahead is the open-air bowling alley I build for them. The rumbling comes from inside, so I park the car and go over.

This takes some time, because my feet want to go the other way. You see, I do not wish to remember my last meeting with these half-pints, when they slip me the old double cross and I wake up twenty years too late for the current World Series.

But I have my scheme to make a thousand government etchings of old George Washington, and I know what I must do.

So I do it. I walk inside.

There on the alleys are about twenty of these extremely small fry that call themselves The Diminutive Society of the Catskill Mountains, although what they really are are dwarfs. Some of them are bowling and the rest are glass-

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ing around a beer barrel.

I almost run out again when I see the beer, because it is this stuff that knocks me out for the long count last time. But I take a deep breath and go up to them.

"Hello slobs, what you hear from the mob?" I ask politely.

The whole crew looks up. They have to look up to see me, because they are only three feet tall, and besides most of them have beards growing right into their eyes.

"Why it's Squire Feep!" cackles the head shorty, who I remember from before. "Back to visit us again!"

THEY get very excited and start dancing around me like I was a Maypole. Some of them are thanking me for the bowling alley, and the head shorty tells me that the new alleys work very good, and that they are using a couple field-mice for pinboys.

"Have a drink," says the head shorty, holding out a tankard.

But this time I play smart. "Not on your life," I tell him. "This is the stuff that ripped Van Winkle. Me, I am sticking to my little flask this trip. I just drop in to see how you boys are getting along."

Well, they do not seem offended, but get back to bowling again, and I take a couple turns at the alley myself.

It is a regulation alley, you understand—I send up a gang to build it myself, because the dwarfs only come out once a year on April 30th, and there is nothing around on other days to make the workmen suspicious. The dwarfs always go in for lawn bowling and ninepins before, but I am glad to see that they understand the new alley very well.

I keep my eye particularly on the head shorty. He is a little guy, like the others, and he has a long white beard that hangs down to his knees, but this does not interfere with his bowling. This personality just runs up one strike after another, even though he stands wrong and his arms are so long I am afraid he bruises his knuckles because they scrape along the alley. But he strikes and drinks and drinks and strikes, and I know I have found what I was looking for.

I sit tight, and after a while the dwarfs get tight. They spend more time around their beer barrel than they do on the alley, and pretty soon I signal the head shorty to come over and sit down with me.

"I wish to ask you a few questions, shrimp," I inform him. So he leaves the beer barrel polka and sits on my lap, confidential like.

"Now, my little Charlie McCarthy, I got a proposition for you. How would you like to make some money?" I say.

He just blinks.

"Big money," I tell him. "A fortune."

"What is money?" he asks.

"Cash. Dollars. Hay. Mazuma. Laughing lettuce."

"Squire Feep, you jest."

"I just what?" Then I catch on This midget is so far back in the woods he does not even know what money is. So I explain. Then he shakes his head. His beard bobs around like a dust mop.

"What do I want with money?" he asks. "I do not visit the face of the earth save once a year, on April 30th. And then it is only to bowl and drink, as is our ancient custom."

"That's just the point," I tell him. "You can make a lot of money bowling the way you do. And then you won't have to live in a hole in the ground. You can live in a swell dump in town. You can visit the Stork Club. Why, you can even go to a barber! A clean shave will make a new man out of you.

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"Besides, I never do figure out why you dwarfs are not around except on this one day, April 30th. Can't you live above ground the rest of the year? Or do you just figure rents are too high?"

"No," he tells me. "I can live above ground. But it's so much nicer down below. All that nice dirt to dig and eat."

"You sound like a columnist," I tell him. "But seriously now, how about coming back to town and bowling for me? I'll manage you and we'll clean up. I've arranged a little exhibition match for you tomorrow night. All you got to do is get up and sling a few balls."

"Tomorrow night? Never!" squeaks Shorty. "I tell you, we of the Catskills must not bowl save on one day alone. If we transgress, dire things transpire."

"Cut the double talk," I tell him. "This is your big chance."

I must refuse, Squire Feep," Shorty pipes. And he wriggles off my knee.

SO THERE I sit, thinking about my lost G. There is nothing to do but pull out my flask.

I do. And then the idea hits me.

Why not? That's what the head shorty does to me the last time I visit him. Turn about is fair play. I drink his beer and pass out. What if he drinks my whiskey?

No sooner said than drunk. I amble over to the keg. The dwarfs are singing now in voices that would not please Walt Disney, but I do not mind. I just stand there and tug at my flask, making happy faces. And sure enough, pretty soon the head shorty sees me and his eyes begin glowing.

"What are you drinking, Squire Feep?" he asks me.

"Just a little beer of my own," I tell him. "Have a slug?"

He takes one. Pretty soon his nose begins glowing.

"Methinks it powerful strong," he tells me.

"Have another."

He does. We sit down in the corner and I let him play spin the bottle.

Meanwhile, outside it is getting dark. The dwarfs begin bowling again, and the rumbling gets louder and louder, drowning out the way my little shorty pal is burping.

Then I see the dwarfs looking over their shoulders at the sunset, and they begin scurrying out of the bowling alley pretty quick. I know they are going back to their caves on the inside of the hill. It is all over.

It is all over with the head shorty, too. Because he is lying under the seat. I cover him with my coat and nobody notices he is missing. The dwarfs say goodnight, and leave.

So I sit there alone in the twilight with the empty flask. It is very quiet now on the mountain. In fact I hear only one sound, like a dive bomber calling its mate.

It is the head dwarf, snoring under my seat.

"Come on," I whisper, carrying him out the door and into the car. "Little man, you'll have a busy day."

IT IS a very busy day indeed, that 1st of May. When the dwarf wakes up in my room about lunch time I can see that he does not want any.

"Where am I?" he groans.

"In my dump, pal," I inform him.

"Why is my beard in my mouth?" he asks.

"There is no beard in your mouth. What you have is merely a slight hangover." I do not tell him that I Mickey Finnish him, but he can guess.

"It is another day!" he squawks, climbing out of the bureau drawer which I park him in for a bed the night

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before. "Squire Feep, you are a false friend! Now I am stranded on upper earth for a year!"

"Calm down," I advise. "It isn't going to hurt you any. A little fresh air and sunshine will do you good."

"Fresh air!" he squeaks. "Sunshine? Never!" He begins to dance up and down, tearing at his beard. "Take me back to my cave!"

"You've got a bowling match tonight," I tell him. "And there'll be lots of nice beer, too."

"I'm hungry. I want some dirt!" he yells.

"How about some nice scrambled eggs?"

"Fie upon eggs! Bring me some nourishing dirt—I need humus!"

Well what can I do but humor him? So I go downstairs and borrow a vacuum cleaner and let my small feathered friend get at the bag. For dessert he finishes up with a little pocket fuzz I find in my overcoat.

"Fine," he says. "Now, Squire Feep, if you'll take me back to the mountains, I can get along very well for the next 364 days until the Diminutive Society comes out again."

"Not on your life," I remind him. "You're going to bowl tonight. Not only that," I say, pulling out a little black mask, "but you're going to wear this over your puss because you are now the Masked Marvel."

"Never, never, never!" says the dwarf. "My name is Timothy."

"I will call you Tiny Tim for short, then. But you are still the Masked Marvel and you bowl tonight."

This does not please Tiny Tim at all. I am none too pleased myself, because the doorbell rings and I have to answer it.

There is the little blonde ginch who is engaged to Yank Albino.

"Oh Mr. Feep!" she says. "I'm so worried, I had to stop by and see if everything is all set for tonight."

"It is," I tell her. "In fact, I have the Masked Marvel right here with me now."

WHICH is true. Because Tiny Tim sticks his head out from between my knees and stares up at her.

"Is this the Masked Marvel?" asks the blonde ginch, with a little shriek. "Why he's so little and old—"

And then she lets out a real shriek, because Tiny Tim leaps up in the air and begins yanking on her curls.

"Gold!" he yells. "Gold!"

"That's hair, you dope," I tell him, pulling him down.

"Then what is that creature?" he asks.

"A ginch."

"What?"

"A broad, a queen, a babe—a woman."

"Woman? What is that?"

"I have not time to go into the matter with you now," I say.

But the blonde giggles. "You mean your little friend has never seen a woman before?" she asks.

"He is a very backward personality," I explain. "In fact he is a hermit from the Catskill Mountains."

"You want to eat some dirt?" Tiny Tim asks her.

The blonde giggles again.

"I think he's cute," she says. And pats him on the head.

Tiny Tim lets go with a smile. Then he blushes. "I like you. Your hair is gold. I like gold," he tells her. Then he makes a grab for her finger. "Gold!" he hollers, tugging at her ring.

"Mustn't touch!" I say, politely bopping him one on the old orange.

"Eccentric, isn't he?" says the blonde ginch. "I hope he knows how to bowl. He must beat Yank tonight."

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"Will you be there?" asks Tiny Tim.

"Certainly," she says.

Tiny Tim turns to me. "Very well, then. I shall bowl. I shall beat this Yank of yours if you wish me to."

I wink at the ginch, because this is a big load off my mind.

"Give me a nice dirt supper," squeals Tiny Tim. "I'll show you some bowling you've never seen in your life!"

It turns out he isn't kidding.

WHEN we get to the bowling alleys that night, Gorilla Gabface is waiting at the door.

"So there you are, Feep," he greets me. "I do not figure you will even turn up after that foolish bet you make. In fact," he sneers, "I already send word to Yank Albino to start exhibition stunts so the crowd will get something for its money. Which is more than you will get for your money, Feep, because I never see anyone in top form like Yank tonight. He has more strikes than an eight day clock."

"Well here is somebody to fix his clock for him," I announce, and push Tiny Tim out from behind me.

He does not look any too good to me, wearing that old-fashioned pair of square-cut shorts the dwarfs caper around in. More and over, he is standing with his knuckles touching the pavement and his beard hanging down between. There is a lot of caked earth on his beard, too, because he insists on having mud-pies for dessert at supper. Besides, his mask is on crooked, and you can't see his face under the hair.

Gorilla Gabface stares. "What is this, a trained monkey?" he yaps. "I do not realize you make your money with a hand organ before, Feep."

"This is the Masked Marvel," I tell him. "Which you will find out as soon as we get on the alleys. Kindly move your fat figure along, Gorilla—I want that thousand smackers."

We go inside; Tiny Tim, the blonde ginch, and myself. Halfway down the aisle the dwarf nudges me.

"I forgot!" he whispers. "This is not April 30th. I cannot bowl. It is against the Catskill laws."

"Quit stalling," I whisper.

"But I mean it, Squire Feep. Something dreadful happens if we bowl on any other than the permitted day. That's why we only appear on April 30th. On all other days something terrible occurs. For your own sake—"

Then the ginch takes over. She gives him the old eye and begins to play with his beard. "You'll do it for me, won't you, Tiny Tim? You must do it."

He turns very red. "Yes, but—"

"Never mind," I crack. "Get hold of a ball and let fly."

Meanwhile I got hold of his whiskers and dragged him out there before the crowd of yahoos in the audience.

They begin to laugh the minute they see him. Gorilla is still introducing the Masked Marvel, and when they see this dopey looking dwarf stumble out they let out a howl.

But after that first ball they howl from astonishment.

To make a short story shorter, Tiny Tim knocks down no less than 240 pins in a row, in less than seven minutes.*

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* When Tiny Tim knocked down 240 pins in a row, he achieved the astounding feat of bowling two perfect games in succession. A perfect game is a score of 300, and is the result of twelve strikes in ten frames, or a complete game. Bowling is scored in ten separate frames, by adding the product of the total pins knocked down on three successive balls. Thus, the first frame receives no score until the third ball, whereupon a score of 30 is marked up. When the fourth ball is bowled, the second frame receives an added 30 pins, making the score 60, and so on, till the last frame. Three balls are thrown in the last frame to finish out the 300 total. This scoring only applies when only consecutive strikes are made. A spare is worth two balls, and thus cuts down the score by ten pins.—Ed.

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He keeps four alleys busy—he does not bother with rules—just picks up a ball and hurls it whenever he sees ten pins together. Yank Albino stands there with his mouth open, and so does Gabface, and so does nearly everyone in the crowd. For that matter I am breathing through my tonsils myself.

The crowd howls and the balls rumble, and the dwarf bowls. And then maybe I am cuckoo, but it seems to me the rumbling is getting louder. It *is* getting louder. It sounds like thunder. It *is* thunder.

Because something hits me on the tip of the nose just then.

Water.

The thunder gets louder, I look up, and I see an extremely strange thing.

It is raining in the bowling alley!

YES, right there inside under the roof, rain is pouring down from the ceiling. And now the thunder is louder than ever, and I can even see a flicker of lightning.

The crowd sees it too. They set up a murmur, but it is better for them if they set up umbrellas, because in a minute the rain turns into a downpour.

Yank Albino and Gorilla Gabface run around making with amazement. But the dwarf is so excited he does not even notice—just keeps right on tossing balls down the four alleys, one after another. And now, every time he makes a strike there is more thunder, and a big streak of lightning to keep score.

People are screaming and pointing at the ceiling, and the alley is getting wet so that the balls float down. Pretty soon the pins are bobbing around on top of water, and the dwarf's legs are wet to the knees. He is almost doing the Australian crawl every time he lets go with a ball.

Then the old panic comes on and the crowd does a Brooklyn—getting up and screaming and trying to head for the door—and Gabface runs out like he hears they discovered gold in the next room.

"Hey—stop!" I call to the dwarf. Now I realize what he means when he says something dreadful happens if he bowls. Because drowning is dreadful, and that is what we are all liable to do here. The water is rising, and now there is more lightning. But the dwarf does not stop. He can not hear me over the thunder and shouting.

I see I have to yank him off the floor, so I wade down and by this time he is up to his waist and swimming in a pool.

But he manages to hurl one last ball —and that does it.

A streak of lightning bangs down from the roof, all the lights go out, and the side of the bowling alley caves in. It is struck.

I get to the dwarf just as he is going down for the third time.

And that is when the cops get to me.

"WHAT do you mean, disorderly conduct?" says Magistrate Donglepootzer.

We are all lined up in front of him in night court about an hour later—me, the blonde ginch, and Tiny Tim.

The cop that brings us in looks at Magistrate Donglepootzer and shrugs. "These people are the ones I find creating a disturbance in a bowling alley," he says.

"A disturbance? What kind of disturbance?"

"Well, this little runt here is bowling and the wall comes down."

"That sounds pretty serious," says the Magistrate, frowning. "You mean he knocked the wall down with a bowling ball? Doesn't look like he has the strength."

"Not exactly," says the cop, turning

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red a little. "He bowls and lightning knocks the wall down."

"Oh, lightning. Then it turns out that a storm is responsible for the damage, and not this man. So why arrest him?"

"He started the storm, Your Honor," pipes the cop, kind of embarrassed.

"What kind of talk is this? People don't start storms, you know. And come to think of it, it isn't raining at all outside."

"I know, your Honor. It's only raining inside this bowling alley."

Magistrate Donglepootzer stares at the cop for a long time. "Do you mean to stand there and tell me that it is raining inside a bowling alley?" he repeats, in a nasty voice.

"I know it's hard to believe, Your Honor, but that's the way it is. I nearly drown trying to arrest these people."

Donglepootzer stares again. "I wish you would drown!" he groans. "Drown dead! Telling me that it's storming inside a bowling alley and a wall falls down—and then arresting these innocent bystanders for disorderly conduct!"

"But this guy starts the storm," protests the cop. "I see it myself. He bowls and it rains."

Donglepootzer turns red now. "Are you trying to drive me crazy?" he says. "Or have you?"

"Yes, Your Honor," says the cop.

"Shut up!" yells Donglepootzer. "I can't stand this. You're trying to tell me this midget with the moss on his face starts storms in bowling alleys. What about the mask on his face, then? Isn't he a burglar, too? And I suppose the woman is his gun moll. And that stupid-looking oaf next to her is undoubtedly an accomplice, perhaps an umbrella salesman."

When he says the part about the stupid-looking oaf he points to me. I resent this, because pointing is not nice.

"Speak up!" he yells at Tiny Tim, all of a sudden. "Maybe you can explain this mad story?"

"It's true, Squire," pipes Tiny Tim. "But I am not responsible. If Squire Feep here hadn't dragged me out of my cave and made me eat dirt all day, I'd still be happy up in the hills with the other dwarfs instead of making thunderstorms in bowling alleys."

DONGLEPOOTZER pulls out a handkerchief and wipes his forehead. Then he talks, in a sort of strangled voice. "That last sentence is perhaps the most remarkable one I shall ever hear," he chokes. "Before I break you," and he points at the cop, "and before I turn all of you maniacs over to the court psychiatrist, I should like you to repeat one statement. Did you or did you not start a thunderstorm in a bowling alley?"

"I did," says Tiny Tim.

Donglepootzer groans. "No, no," he whispers. "I can't believe it. I won't believe it! All of you—come with me."

"Where are you taking us?" asks the blonde ginch.

"Downstairs," says Donglepootzer. "Downstairs. There is a recreation gymnasium here in the station for police officers. I believe it has a bowling alley attached to the premises. You are going to bowl for me, by little friend. I want you to show me exactly what you did before I see a psychiatrist myself."

"You will not enjoy it," says Tiny Tim, pulling at his beard.

And when we get to the alley, Magistrate Donglepootzer does not enjoy it, a small bit.

While the cop watches, he gives Tiny Tim a ball. I act as pinboy. And Tiny Tim lets go.

At first everything is fine. Donglepootzer cannot believe the way he

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knocks the pins over.

Then I hear a rumbling.

"How about stopping?" I ask.

Donglepootzer shakes his head. "I must see this," he groans.

I shrug. Tiny Tim bowls. Thunder growls.

Well, what's the use? All I can state is that ten minues later Donglepootzer is trying to dog-paddle his way out of the alley when a bolt of lightning uncorks from the ceiling and the police gymnasium roof caves in like an eggshell.

"Help!" yells the blonde ginch.

"Blub-blub," gurgles the dwarf, going under water.

"Holy Smokes!" bawls the cop.

"Six months for disorderly conduct," groans Magistrate Donglepootzer.

IT IS lucky for me that Tiny Tim and I end up in the same cell that night.

It is also lucky for me that the dwarf is in good appetite. Otherwise he can never swallow all the dirt he does, to say nothing of about three pounds of cement.

But he manages. It is nearly six a.m. when he finally gets a hole big enough at the bottom of the side of the cell and wriggles out.

He crawls down the hall to the turnkey's office and manages to sneak the keys off the desk. Then he crawls back.

I unlock the cell and we do a fast and furious powder. This powder does not end until we are in the car and heading out of town.

Before I go, I stop for only one thing. I call up Gorilla Gabface on the phone and get him out of bed.

"About that thousand bucks," I tell him, "I still claim my Masked Marvel wins and you owe me."

"I owe you nothing, Feep!" growls Gabface. Then he laughs. "Because the match is called on account of rain!"

I let out a few harsh names, but I can do nothing—except get out of town before the heat is on.

Which I do.

We reach the Catskills that afternoon. I dump Tiny Tim out of the back seat.

"Well, now what?" he asks me.

"Help me with these canned goods," I tell him. "Bring them inside your private bowling alley here. I need something to eat these next 363 days."

"You are staying here?" he asks.

Where else? The heat is on in town for me, and you can't go back to your little pals until next April 30th. We might as well live here together. Then neither one of us gets into trouble. We are all alone here in the alley on top of the mountain, and I hope we stay that way."

We do.

There is not much worth telling about that year. I am not cut out for the hermit life, being an uptown boy, but after I teach Tiny Tim how to deal a few hands of pinochle, we get along all right. Beside I keep him in bowling practice.

Every once in a while I slip down the mountain into town to catch up with this and that. I find out from the local bladder's sports section that Gorilla Gabface takes his Yank Albino on a tour all over the country, and is cleaning up.

I just smile, because I figure out a plan. I smile and keep track of the days, and finally the time comes.

One morning I grab Tiny Tim by the beard to wake him up, as usual. Only this time I have a scissors in my other hand. And in two snips the beard is off.

"What is this?" he bawls. "Squire Feep, what are you doing?"

"I am shaving you," I tell him. "But

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close. So hold still."

HE DOES not hold still, but I shave him.

"What is the meaning of this?" he squeaks, feeling his chin.

"It means that you are now Tiny Tim, the Boy Bowler," I say. "Let me put on this hair dye, now."

Which I do, holding him down until I finish and he is a little clean-shaven guy with black hair.

"Boy Bowler?" he gasps.

"Certainly." I tell him. "You do not think I spend my time this year with you because I love your company. I prefer to be a hermit with somebody like Lana Turner. But I am going to get my money back from this Gorilla Gabface before you go back to the hills for good, and so I figure out this scheme.

"Today is April 27th. We drive to Milwaukee and arrive there on the 29th. I wire ahead and arrange a match between the Boy Bowler and Yank Albino —because the papers tell me he will be playing exhibition games there. And I make another bet with Gorilla, only this time I collect, rain or no rain. Then we fly back here in time for the 30th and you can join your pals, the Catskills Mountain Junior G-Men, or whatever they are."

Tiny Tim listens to this and scratches the place where his beard should be. "Methinks it sounds reasonable," he decides. "But it rains when I bowl."

"Just leave that part to me," I say. "I have it all figured out, this time."

Which I have. Only it is not figured out the way I care to tell him about. Because I tell him it is the 27th when I know it is the 28th. So we will arrive in Milwaukee on the 30th and hold the match.

Of course the 30th is the one day a year when it will not rain if the dwarf bowls.

That is not such a hot trick on Tiny Tim, I know—but I need the money and after all I spend a year in hiding. I figure that the next year will be easier on him, now that he knows pinochle. Besides, when I clean up, I will not only buy him a bushel of the best dirt, but also some fancy milorganite.

So we make the drive. A thousand miles between the Catskills and Wisconsin is not too easy, but I am so happy at figuring things out, I do not mind.

In Buffalo I wire ahead to Gorilla Gabface that I find a new champion bowler and want another match with Yank Albino.

"Play it up big," I state. "My boy is only 7 years old and a marvel. But five grand says he beats Yank Albino."

I get an answer waiting for me in Cleveland. It is OK, bet and all.

And so, on April 30th, at 8 o'clock, we pull up in front of the Milwaukee alleys, Tiny Tim and I.

It is a beautiful spring day, and I cannot help but wonder how the dwarfs are enjoying it back in the Catskills. Only I do not speak to Tiny Tim about this, because he will not understand and just get sore.

So far everything is under control. I buy clothes on the way, and now Tiny Tim the Boy Bowler is wearing a little knicker suit and a moppet's hat. He is disguised perfectly, as I shave him again, close.

GORILLA is waiting in the office, and when he sees Tiny Tim he doesn't tumble.

"Feep, you pick up the oddest characters," he chuckles. "First a fugitive from a miniature golf course, and now a school boy. Of course it's tremendous publicity stunt stuff, but why you want to plunk away five grand, I don't know."

"I am making five grand," I tell him.

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"And besides, this is no school boy, but a genuine Quiz Kid. Come on, let's get started."

Gabface steps close to me. "Just a minute, Feep," he says. "If there's anything phoney about this kid, you're going to catch plenty. I'll leave you looking like a map of Japan. Because unless Yank Albino makes a good showing tonight, I'm dropping his contract and taking another man. Bowling officials are here to look him over. So just remember—if you cross me you can mark the 29th of April as your unlucky day."

"The what?" I gasp.

"The 29th of April, dope! Today."

I go green around the gills. I realize I make a terrible mistake in keeping track of the days back there in the Catskills. I think I am kidding the dwarf about the dates, but I really kid myself. Today is the 29th—and it looks like thunderstorms ahead!

But it is too late to say anything.

Because a bald-headed man sticks his head in. "Come on, all set?" he yells. "You should see the crowd out there—boy, we're packing them in. Bet you a hundred there's 2,000 people."

"This is Better O'Brien, the promotor," Gabface introduces. "Better, meet Lefty Feep and the Boy Bowler."

Tiny Tim keeps plenty quiet. He thinks it's all right and I have a scheme. He should only know!

"Go on out there, Tim," I tell him, gulping. "Everything is all set."

SET is right. The dwarf marches out, with his arms dangling. This Better O'Brien person laughs.

"Some champion you've dug up, Feep," he chuckles. "Hear you put five grand on him to win out tonight. Wish I had a piece of that myself. Why that little kid couldn't lift a ball, let alone beat Yank Albino. Gorilla has a sure thing betting against you."

All I do is groan.

"You wouldn't want to make another wager on him, would you, Feep?" says O'Brien.

I groan again. Because outside in the alleys I hear a rumbling that tells me the match is starting. And the rumbling is getting louder. Like thunder.

"Frankly," O'Brien keeps up, "I think your man is all wet."

I groan again and walk into the alleys with O'Brien. What else can I do? I am a drowning man without a straw.

To make a long story short, I guess you know what happens on that Milwaukee alley on the 29th of April. The local bladders tell the story, only I do not save any.

All I can say is that after the storm I pay Gorilla Gabface five grand, he bounces Yank Albino off his contract, Yank Albino makes up with his blonde ginch, and me—me, I'm spending two hours pumping water out of Tiny Tim the dwarf, who nearly drowns.

The alley is flooded, and this time lightning hits the top of the building outside. In the excitement I wade down into the water and shrink a brand new suit.

Then I hop a plane with Tiny Tim and get him back to the Catskills the next day and turn him loose with the other dwarfs. This time I do not stay to bowl, but come right back into town. And so here I am with my fortune.

* * *

LEFTY FEEP finished his story and shook the water from his hair as he looked at me.

I stared back.

"That's a pretty hard story to swallow," I commented.

He just grinned.

"Not that I don't believe you about the dwarf and all," I told him. "But

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that other stuff—about making your fortune. I thought you said it stormed in Milwaukee and you had to pay Gabface five thousand dollars. Where does your fortune come in?"

"Didn't I mention?" asked Feep. "Didn't I tell why I like rain?"

"You didn't."

"Well it is funny such a matter slips my mind. Because it is all very simple. You remember I mention a personality name of Better O'Brien the promoter who talks with me before we go into the alleys?"

"Yes."

"Well, I make a fortune from Better O'Brien. The idea comes like a flash while we stand there. I know I lose five thousand to Gorilla because of what will happen, so I turn around and bet O'Brien ten thousand. It looks like a sure thing to him and he takes it up."

"You mean you bet O'Brien ten thousand dollars that your dwarf would win at bowling?" I asked.

"Of course not," grinned Lefty Feep. "I merely bet him ten thousand dollars that it is going to rain all over his brand new suit in ten minutes."

THE END

☆ STRANGE FACTS ☆

SUICIDE WEATHER

DR. WILLIAM F. PETERSEN of the University of Illinois and Dr. Clarence A. Mills of the University of Cincinnati believe the changes in weather may cause a sensitive person to commit suicide. Statistics show that suicides are classed with weather irregularities.

FOUR-LEGGED BIRD

THERE is a strange bird called the hoactzin, which during its adolescent stage develops real feet on its wings, in addition to its ordinary two legs, for extra support when walking.

The hoactzin is an inhabitant of South America and makes its home near water. This four-footed bird is thought to be a freak of evolution, which has survived from the time when wings first came into being in the animal world.

DETERMINED DANDELIONS

WHILE the dandelion has the essential parts of all other flowers for producing pollen and culminating pollination, it develops its seeds without having them fertilized. The seeds are fatherless and their birth virginal.

All other flowers are dependent on insects, weather and other factors to scatter the pollen—the prolific dandelion is dependent on nothing for its unfertilized seeds ripen without any pollination at all.

SHAME ON YOU, MR. CROCKY!

THE most destructive and feared enemy of the huge crocodiles of Egypt is a tiny animal which resembles the weasel called the Ichneumon. It is hardly big enough to make a tasteful morsel for the crocodile, yet this little creature exterminates mass groups of these great crocodiles by working its way under the sand where the eggs of these reptiles are concealed and sucking the entire batch.

FEATHERED AVIATOR

AMONG birds, the Arctic tern has no successful competitor in the way of long distance flying among birds. This "champ" makes a round trip of 22,000 miles every year. It goes from extreme north to extreme south—truly reaching the ends of the earth.

TAKING POISON TO LIVE

MANY a man has lived through a severe heart attack by taking poison. Strychnine, nitroglycerine and digitalis are all extremely poisonous. But when given in small doses they are successful heart stimulants. A larger dose, say half a grain, is destructive. The majority of poisons when given in small amounts are stimulating.

GOOD OLD WHITE XMAS

HOW many times have you heard the following remark? "I remember when we had deep snow on the ground for two solid months during the winter. It seems that the climate is undergoing a change. Not so severe any more. Remember those good old-fashioned sleigh rides at Christmas?"

That, sir, is what can be termed a fallacy. By a study of the weather records it has been proved that the so-called "Christmas weather," where all is white and serene actually occurs only about once in eight years.

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FANTASTIC FACTS

By CARTER C. WAINWRIGHT

There may be nothing new under the sun, but there are certainly many odd things!

AMATEUR FOSSIL FINDERS

RECENTLY a couple of young fellows anxiously brought some bones dug up in a field near Chicago to Chicago's Field Museum for identification. They were sure they had discovered some very ancient and very valuable fossils. Breathlessly they watched as the paleontologist (an expert on fossils) took out his spectacles and then examined the fossils.

"Equus caballus," said the fossil expert, "or horse bones."

"But how could such bones—bones of a plain everyday horse ever be found six feet under the ground?" inquired one of the lads.

With the utmost kindness, the paleontologist asked:

"And just what do you suppose the farmers of this country do with their horses after they die?"

SING WHILE YOU WORK

WORKERS singing at their work on wind tunnel propellers at the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics' laboratory at Langley Field, Va., have been known to turn out more work than when they kept quiet.

"These employees put together large, wood propellers used in the wind tunnels where aircraft and aircraft parts are tested," explains John F. Victory, secretary of the association. "It is necessary that they work fast in superimposing large numbers of layers of laminated wood on each other with glue between. The individual propeller blades must be completed and put in a press before the glue dries.

"It was discovered that when the workmen sang, setting up cadence for their task, each blade would be completed in 20 minutes. When they didn't sing it took 27 minutes."

FIVE MILE BEAM

WATCH an army searchlight shoot its beams into the sky and you get an almost perfect idea of what infinity would look like if you could see it. The beam reaches out endlessly, from a dazzling white spot at the lens to the dull gray converging of the beam high up in the heavens. You lose all concept of distances until a plane gets caught in the beam. Then the plane usually looks like an angry moth trying to beat its way out of the light.

Searchlights used by our army in anti-aircraft work penetrate the lower atmosphere and stab up into the stratosphere as a beam. These lights have a range of five and one-half miles, or about 28,000 feet. The reflecting mirrors are 60 inches in diameter, cast a beam of 800,000,000 candlepower. The front cover glass is made of a special glass so tough that a strip of it can be used as a springboard for a swimming pool. A narrow strip of this special tempered glass placed between two blocks has been able to support the weight of a 200 pound man.

"GOLDEN" METEORITES

IT'S believed among certain Arabs that they have been punished for their greed by Allah who has turned meteorites into iron. According to the legend, the meteorites fall originally in the form of gold, next they turned to silver, and finally in a fit of rage against the avarice of his people, Allah turned the meteorites into so much iron.

INSTALMENT BRIDES

DESPITE the war there has been no curtailment of selling brides on the instalment plan in the Kei group of islands in the Netherlands East Indies. Buxom brides from the upper crust of Kei society sell in the neighborhood of five-hundred dollars, payable in gold. (Kei is still on the gold standard.) The terms of payment depend entirely upon the bridegroom's father-in-law, but generally speaking the terms are more liberal than our present eighteen-months limit on radios, furniture, and the like in this country.

The bride's father keeps an account of the payments by carving a record on the face of a board that resembles a sawed-off paddle. When the payments are completed the board is given to the bridegroom as a receipt and formal marriage license. While gold coins and ornaments are the usual medium of exchange, these bridal boards also show that payments have been made with everything from bubble gum to pigs.

Just what happens when a bridegroom fails to meet his payments is not known. Perhaps the proud bride's papa can come and repossess his daughter just as our instalment collectors here come and repossess furniture, radios, and autos. But we wonder; does the bridegroom get his money back?

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Mademoiselle Butterfly watched the beautiful creature take on a tiny human form

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MADEMOISELLE BUTTERFLY!

by DON WILCOX

THE invisible trap was closing in on me the night I finished my sell-out week at the Fraise Theatre.

The packed house applauded and shouted, "Bravo!" and "Long live Raymond Quinton!" I took eight curtain calls and by that time the grandiose governor of the island had mounted the stage to bestow official congratulations upon me.

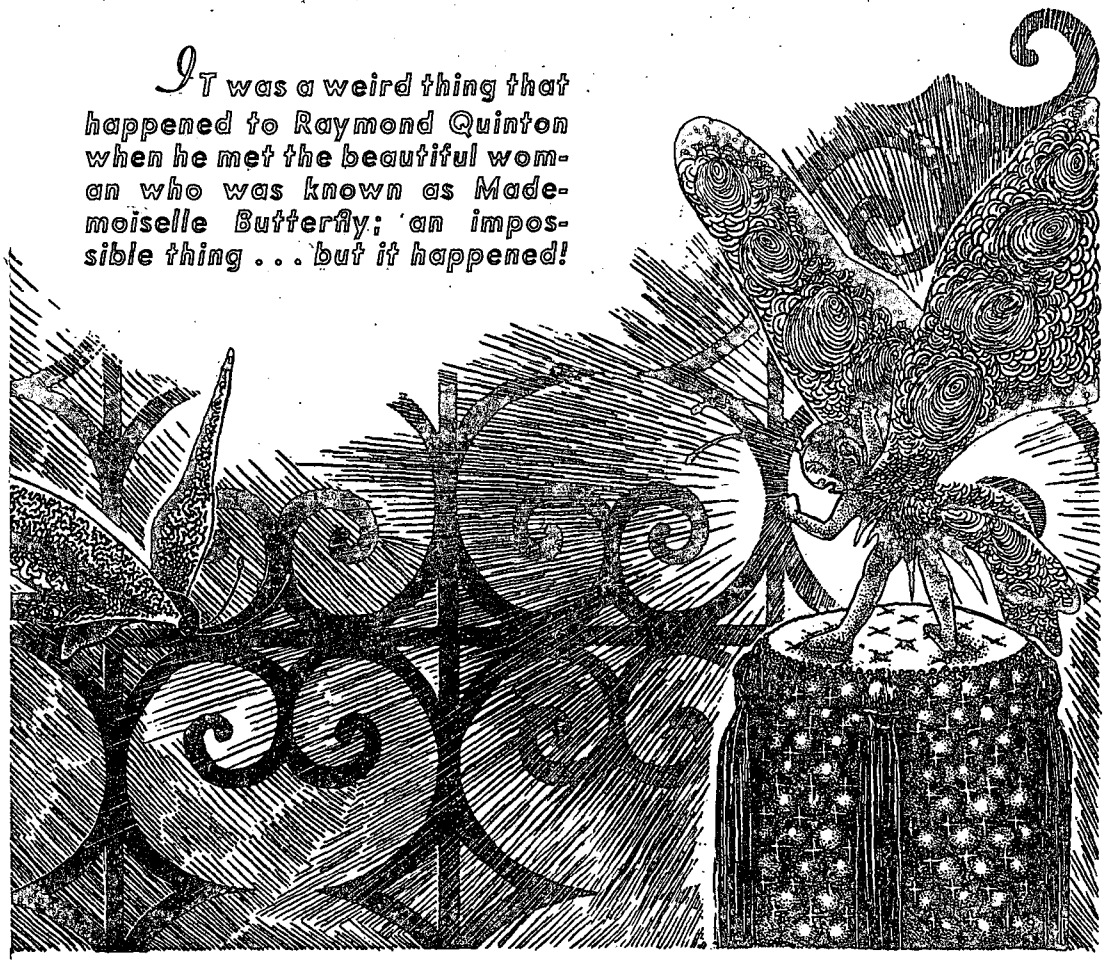
"Raymond Quinton," he shouted, placing a dynamic hand on my shoulder, "you are the greatest actor in all France—yes, in all the world."

His vast jaw snapped decisively and his beady little eyes gleamed. He might have been making a historic pronouncement. The audience backed him up with an immense cheer.

"Moreover you are the greatest lover the stage has ever known! . . . Ladies of the audience, am I not right?"

The ladies shrieked with delight and

IT was a weird thing that happened to Raymond Quinton when he met the beautiful woman who was known as Mademoiselle Butterfly; an impossible thing . . . but it happened!



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some of them jumped to their feet to lead cheers for me. It was a ridiculous demonstration, the more so because none of this profuse praise was for me. It was for a famous name—*Raymond Quinton.*

But not even my fellow actors guessed I was *not* the celebrated Quinton. (My name was Louis Ribot.)

The governor concluded the flattery-ritual by making me promise I would return next year. Then the curtain went down.

I did not leave the island of Fraise that night as I had expected. The governor insisted that I stay over for another day.

"All week you have been here," the governor argued, "and not once have you seen the rarest of the island's beauties. Tomorrow you must see her—the one and only Mademoiselle Butterfly."

So I stayed.

Gaston, my companion and fellow actor—the flashy little comedian of this summer's troupe—stayed with me.

At noon the following day Gaston and I were picked up by the governor's private limousine. We circled through the town and followed a short steep trail toward the upper extremity of the island.

"Splendid site," Gaston commented. "You'd think the governor would have placed his palace on that bit of hill."

"That bit of hill," the chauffeur volunteered, "was owned by an international society of scientists before his honor was made governor."

"Scientists?" Gaston blinked. "Do scientists live there?"

"One," said the chauffeur. "Mademoiselle Butterfly's father—a naturalist of some note, I have been told. He has developed the rare specimens of insect life which his beautiful daughter will doubtless show you."

"Insect life!—that reminds me," Gaston said. "Did you ever hear the English joke about the caterpillar and the hot biscuits?"

The chauffeur made no answer. I told Gaston I would save his caterpillar joke for Mademoiselle Butterfly.

"If she's as beautiful as they say," said Gaston, "the stage's greatest lover might want to stay over a whole week. You've never met her, have you?"

"I—I think not," I said.

"He *thinks* not!" Gaston clasped his head and groaned. "He meets so many beautiful girls all over the continent, he can't remember who's on his list."

I CHUCKLED for Gaston's benefit. But the circumstances were more complicated than I cared to reveal.

The fact was, I—Louis Ribot—had been employed as a double for the famous Raymond Quinton. Every summer he had me take over his minor engagements. But I was under oath

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* This unusual manuscript was discovered in a rubbish heap on the tiny French island of Fraise after a recent bombing. It was written in exceedingly fine, delicate script between the printed lines of a book. This curious circumstance led the finder of the book to turn it over to scientists for investigation. Microscopic studies revealed that the writing had not been done by a pen. Nor were there any traces of hand marks crossing the pages parallel to the lines of writing. Instead, there were numerous prints of tiny feet one-half inch in length and three-sixteenths of an inch in width. These foottracks were perfect miniatures of human feet—a left and a right.

All of these evidences were at first assumed to be parts of an elaborate hoax, perpetrated by a trickster. But further investigation argued that known facts regarding several mysterious disappearances during the past decade dovetailed perfectly with the facts of this fantastic personal account, although the names of the unfortunate persons were disguised.

Finally, the book has been examined by three well-known naturalists, who agree that the fine ink-lines of the script could have been deposited by the tongue of a butterfly.

The book has been placed in the Municipal Museum of Lisbon where it is available for inspection.—Ed.

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not to confide this secret.

Consequently Gaston was ignorant of my identity. He thought I was Quinton. He followed me around to bask in my fame. He became my good man Friday. At once we were fast friends.

Our limousine circled into the high graveled driveway. We alighted, ascended the wide white steps. It was a clean, commodious looking mansion from this approach, its white brick walls and wide ornamental French windows giving it the aspect of a hilltop palace. Gusts of sea air sifted through the fragrant shrubbery.

We waited a full minute before anyone answered the bell. Then a stately butler with athletic shoulders and a guileless face bowed through the open door and tendered his regrets.

"You have come to see Mademoiselle Butterfly," he said hollowly. "Governor Revel, however, has just telephoned to cancel your visit."

"Not so fast, my friend," I said. "You'll have to dish up a better excuse than that. The governor sent us—"

"I understand, sir, but—"

"His own limousine brought us up—"

"And it will take you back down," said the butler. "Governor Revel advises that you catch a boat for the continent at once to return ahead of the storm."

I turned to Gaston. "What do you make of this?"

"A cheap trick. There's no sign of a storm, not even a pain in my left ankle."

"Messieurs, a severe storm is on its way," said the butler bleakly. "The butterflies are very sensitive. They never fail to give warning."

"Butterflies, bah!" said Gaston. "My left ankle is the most sensitive—Ouch! —Oof!" Gaston sprung his weight on his left foot and scowled comically. "Messieurs," he mimicked the butler's stern demeanor, "a severe storm is on its way."

"Good day, messieurs," the butler snapped, but I refused to let him close the door till I knew what this was all about.

"For two cents," I said, "I'd punch somebody."

I must have said the wrong thing. Suddenly three more butlers appeared, and the four of them were a perfect set of quadruplets, even to their expressions. Their uniforms were alike except for the lettering on the shoulders. From left to right the shoulder insignias read, W, X Y and Z.

Gaston snapped at them like a cross puppy. "Where's the rest of the family? Bring out the old man. We'll battle all five of you."

"Never mind, Gaston," I said. "If this is Mademoiselle Butterfly's courtesy—"

"Mademoiselle is about to receive a guest," said the butler with the W. "A special guest from the governor."

"Let's go," Gaston whispered. "I never did trust that governor."

AS WE turned down the steps, a taxi rolled up the driveway. A tall gentleman with a steel-blue suit and a cocky blue hat with a silver feather got out and marched up the walk. A sword swung at his side.

Nearing us, he stopped. His black eyebrows lifted, the trim mustache widened with surprise.

"Monsieur Quinton!"

I bowed as if I knew him.

Playing the role of a double is treacherous business, as anyone can imagine. I was forever bumping into someone that I was *supposed* to know. This fellow glowered at me menacingly.

"So it's you, the puffed-up actor," he said. "No wonder the governor wanted to spare you the pleasure of

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crossing my path."

"I beg your pardon?" I was sure this could no other than Maurice De Brosse, noted fencing instructor at the University of Paris, considered the master swordsman of Europe. I had often seen his pictures.

"Those insults you flung at me from the stage of the Moliere," said the swordsman, "have not been paid for. But revenge is sweet, my dear fellow."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said, for Raymond Quinton had failed to inform me of this enemy.

"No?" He smirked sarcastically. "I suppose you took my written challenge for a cashier's check and passed it at the bank. Or a pawn ticket to redeem your wig."

The fellow's insolent smile bore down on me. He drew his sword and patted it gently across the palm of his hand.

"He's crazy," Gaston hissed.

I glanced toward the entrance of the white brick mansion. Two of the lettered butlers had disappeared, the other two were eyeing me coldly. There was a stinging insult in their glare. Obviously the great Raymond Quinton, the stage's greatest lover, was less welcome here than this ill-tempered swordsman. At heart I was neutral, knowing nothing of the original quarrel. But this was no time to let the great Quinton down.

"Fortunately," I said, "there is no law on this island to prohibit duelling. I may as well settle your grudge before I catch a boat for the continent."

Maurice De Brosse nodded. "Before you catch a cloud for the pearly gates, you mean," he said. "This unexpected good luck will assure me of the *other* victory I have scheduled for today." He turned to a butler. "Will you bring us a sword?"

"Z had gone for one, Monsieur De Brosse."

"You seem to be at home here," Gaston observed. "What's your other victory?"

"Today," said De Brosse, "I've come to ask Mademoiselle Butterfly to marry me. After she sees how swiftly I dispose of men who fling insults, she will come into my arms."

A BUTLER came down the steps with a rusty relic of a sword. My bluff had gone farther than I intended. The other butlers huddled in the doorway to watch. Back of them a tall stony-faced man appeared, and with him—a beautiful girl.

The frightened look in the girl's eyes was all I saw for the next minute. I was vaguely aware that I weighed the sword in my hand, that Gaston warned me I was a fool to try my skill against this master; that the arrogant De Brosse was making boastful and mocking remarks for the amusement of the butlers—pointing out certain blossoms among the lawn flowers that he thought would go well with my chalk-white face.

What did Mademoiselle Butterfly make of all this, I wondered. I fancied I saw her fingers trembling. She whispered something to her father, who frowned in my direction and shook his head, as much as to say that he didn't know who I was. Or perhaps that he was sorry for my chances.

The girl was looking at me too, and I thought she started forward as if she wanted to say something. Three or four butterflies, that I had first taken to be ornaments, fluttered up from her wealth of honey-colored hair.

"Don't go into this!" Gaston whispered in my ear. "You haven't a chance."

I came back to myself with a jerk. De Brosse, smiling treacherously, was advancing, his sword ready.

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Suddenly the air was aglitter with flying blades. I maneuvered backward. He drove me down the walk. He crowded me against the taxi, whose driver shouted at us not to scar his fenders. On back I went, hoping to catch a momentary advantage when I came to the governor's limousine—only it wasn't there.

We circled around the drive. Gaston followed us as close as he dared, gasping advice.

"Let me take over, Quinton! I'm your man. I'll—"

"Shut up," I said. "This is my fight."

"You're inviting murder," Gaston yelled, "by a professional—"

"What's that?" De Brosse changed his stance to embrace both of us. "So *you* want to get in on this?"

"I'm in on it," said Gaston, and he jerked a pistol out of his pocket. My arms went icy. That was nothing more than a stage pistol, probably empty. But it was a pistol.

De Brosse drew back and stared giddily. "Hold on, here, this is a fair duel—"

"It's going to be, from now on," said Gaston. "You and me. When I get through with you, Quinton can have what's left." He barked an order to the nearest butler. "We're duelling with pistols. See that this man is supplied."

STURDY fellow, Gaston—a hundred and twenty-five pounds of courage and loyalty! De Brosse couldn't talk him out of it. He brandished the gun and said it would either be a pistol duel or a pistol murder.

And so, a minute later, Gaston and De Brosse carried on, and I was out of it.

Back to back, they marched apart twenty paces. At the signal, they whirled to fire.

In that critical moment a butterfly lighted on De Brosse's nose. The swordsman's shot went wild.

"Now I've got you," said Gaston, taking deliberate aim.

"Hold your fire, damn it. I was fouled—"

"I'll plug you right through the heart!"

"I was fouled, I tell you. That damned butterfly—" The swordsman wailed, batting at his face.

"I'll knock it off," said Gaston. He steadied his pistol with the utmost care.

Again the butterfly settled on De Brosse's nose, crept up to his forehead. He struck at it, knocked it down. Then the girl's voice cried out.

"Don't kill it. Don't!"

Out of the door she came running to throw serself at De Brosse. Her voice was nothing less than hysterical.

"How could you do such a thing, Maurice? You struck it down you—you brute!"

"And which is more important," the swordsman asked coldly, "my life or the life of a measly butterfly?"

"Oh, Maurice!" The girl broke into angry tears. "After all I've told you!"

The father hurried down to her as she bent to pick up the brilliant little winged creature. "It's dead? I'm sorry," he said consolingly. Then turning to De Brosse, he said coldly, "I'm surprised, Maurice. You've been here many times. You know how Madeline and I feel. Every living thing has its place. We're all a part of nature —you — these strangers — this butterfly—these flowers—"

De Brosse was in no mood to be tender toward butterflies and flowers. He noted, however, that his adversary had chivalrously put the gun away.

The swordsman struggled out of his fright and began some strong apology-

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talk in the direction of the girl and her father.

"Sorry, Madeline. I didn't intend this mess until these scoundrels accosted me—"

He should have saved his lie until I was gane. I couldn't take it. I marched into him with my fists and landed a solid one on his jaw that made his sword clank in its scabbard. But Gaston yelped, "Desist!" and the four butlers pounced on me and dragged me down the walk to the limousine. It had just come back, and the governor himself was in it.

"Sorry, Gentlemen," the governor said. "A slight error in arrangements. Under the conditions your visit will have to be postponed."

"Permanently," I said, as we drove away. "If she prefers the company of that savage knife flinger, I don't care to meet her."

"She won't be seeing much more of De Brosse, I've a hunch." Governor Revel's smug jaw-heavy face wore the very expression that an amateur stage villain employs to inspire distrust. "I hope you'll change your mind and meet her. And . . . I think you will."

On the sly Gaston whispered to me, "I *know* you will. The great lover of the stage can't be scared off."

MY own over-zealous curiosity—or perhaps it was my romantic weakness—conspired to make Gaston's prediction come true.

Then, too, the weather had a hand in it.

The predicted storm struck the island, so we learned, a few hours after we returned to the continent. It played havoc with the village. It shattered many of the beautiful windows in the white-brick mansion. The papers carried the pictures.

I read the news reports to the last detail. A rash plan burst upon me. I snatched at it. A few days of preparations, with Gaston's help, and then. . . .

There were no brass bands blaring a welcome to stage stars when Gaston and I returned to the island of Fraise two weeks later. We were *incognito*.

We stepped from the boat landing into a taxi, expecting to be taken directly to the home of Mademoiselle Butterfly. My plan was off to a perfect start.

There were three of us: an architect, Jean Pash, famous for his restorations of cathedral windows following the World War; his two assistants—Gaston and myself.

Monsieur Pash was due for a rude shock when he should discover how little we knew about glass mosaics. We had hired out to him as apprentices only after framing an accident and saving him from it, thereby establishing ourselves in his favor.

Monsieur Pash's order to the taxi driver caught us napping.

"Take us first to the governor," the architect said.

The governor was the last person we wanted to see. Not that we didn't consider ourselves well disguised. As actors we had taken on the make-up, clothes, dialects and manners suitable to architects' apprentices. But if the governor should see through us—

I literally held my breath as we taxied into the palace grounds. What was up the architect's sleeve?

Governor Revel strolled up to the runningboard, bestowed passing glances upon Gaston and me and gave his full attention to our boss. I breathed again.

"Whatever the cost of fixing the blown-out windows," said the governor, after he had checked over the architect's credentials, "the island government will stand good for it. I want the scientist to be pleased."

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"Thank you," said the architect. "Monsieur Dujardin shall have new windows as fine as any Gothic cathedral. But tell me, is it safe for my assistants and me to stay at Monsieur Dujardin's house?"

"Safe?" Of course," the governor snorted. "The hotel has been closed for repairs, as I wrote you, but the white brick mansion has ample accommodations. There are four butlers—"

"I have heard," said the architect, eyeing the governor stonily, "that one swordsman by the name of De Brosse recently disappeared."

THIS was true. The papers had headlined this "MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE!"

"Oh, that!" the governor appeared to be greatly amused. "*You* have nothing to worry about."

"I have *me* to worry about," said the architect. "I have my two assistants. If it is true that Monsieur De Brosse disappeared, and that you did not even send officers to investigate—"

The governor tossed his head back, scowling defiantly. "I have no jurisdiction over that end of the island," he snapped. "The scientist has that kingdom to himself. But I will tell you what happened."

I nudged Gaston, who sat expressionless beside be. I knew he was taking every word down in his lightning swift mind.

"The swordsman, like a few other men who have—er—removed themselves from circulation," said the governor, jutting his wide jaw contemptuously, "were suitors of Monsieur Dujardin's daughter. Each in turn, the scientist has confided to me, asked to marry her."

"Don't tell us they resorted to suicide!" said the architect.

"Wait till I finish," said the governor. "You see, Mademoiselle Butterfly is so imbued with her father's notions about man's place in Nature that she subjects each lover to a test of worthiness. *The Test of Dust,* they call it. It must be a severe test. De Brosse, like his predecessors, failed. Naturally he was stung. Have you ever been badly stung, Monsieur Pash?"

"I—er—ahem—" The architect narrowed his eyes defensively.

"The natural thing," said the governor, "is to slip away into hiding. That's what Maurice De Brosse has done. Instead of ferrying back to the continent, he slipped back by a *steel cable.* You'll see it from the rear of the scientist's house—the first cable of a bridge that was to have been built across the narrows."

"Curious," said the architect.

"Mademoiselle Butterfly's defeated lovers find it the quickest way out," said the governor, mopping perspiration from his forehead. "The other side of those narrows is Portugal. It's a short distance to rail, ship, and air ports. You see how easy it was for De Brosse to give his world the slip? Now—have I done away with your chills, Monsieur?"

THE architect nodded, satisfied. Governor Revel waved us away. But glancing back I saw the chauffeur, the one who had driven Gaston and me on our previous visit, standing near the driveway staring after us. We turned out of sight, but I didn't feel too comfortable over the deal.

A few minutes later the tall mild-mannered Dujardin was conducting us through his laboratories. There was a strange depth about this scientist, both appealing and mystifying.

"Very interesting, very interesting," Monsieur Pash kept saying, "but your brand of magic and mine don't mix.

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I'd better start surveying the windows for repairs."

"There'll be several days of work," the scientist smiled, "so you needn't be in any hurry."

But Monsieur Pash was impatient to break out some of the dangerous hanging glass that had been poorly boarded up. So our tour was sidetracked in the direction of the damaged windows.

"These on the south were particularly beautiful," said Dujardin, "but I'm not sad that they are gone. I want to replace them with some rare types of glass to aid my experiments."

We left the architect to his preliminary surveys. But Monsieur Dujardin was eager to show more of his laboratories, and Gaston and I were willing to see.

We passed through one narrow laboratory room after another. To catch the sunlight to best advantage, these rooms had been tacked onto the house in a zig-zagging chain, enclosing a small open court.

The scientist led us out into this court, mentioning that we might be interested in seeing some synthetic butterflies.

"Synthetic!" I gasped. But a nudge from Gaston reminded me to hold my tongue. Too much curiosity wouldn't become a common workman.

"What a place! What a place!" Gaston mumbled as we followed the scientist down the sunshiny path. It was the most richly colored flower garden I ever saw—almost luminous. Perhaps the colors were enhanced by the contrast of powdery blue mountain tops which rose above the zig-zagging rooftops—a bit of the Portugal shore peeking over. Everything within the enclosed court was beautiful, fragrant, and serene.

No, there were a few harsh sounds that intruded—the intermittent hammering and wrenching along a section of broken windows facing the court. The architect had already started work clearing away some of the dangerous hanging glass.

But the sounds which blended with the beauty of the place were the soft hum of bees and—the low intense voice of Mademoiselle Butterfly herself.

"Father!" she called. "Come see the new butterfly! He's unfolding his wings. He's marvelous!"

"Really! Come, gentlemen. This will be worth seeing."

Mademoiselle Butterfly was kneeling at the foot of a white trellis of rambling roses. At her feet was an outcropping of rock, pink colored and porous, that reminded me of an enlarged chunk of pink taffy candy. On a ridge of this brittle rock sat the newly emerged butterfly.

"Wait till he opens his wings again," said the girl, pausing in her fascination long enough to glance at Gaston and me.

PERSONALLY I thought the butterfly far less interesting than the girl, and while she chattered about this latest synthetic insect I mused upon the loveliness of honey-colored hair and a child-like face as ornaments for such a flower garden.

The butterfly was a flimsy colorless leaf-like creature—until it opened its wings. Then its true colors came into the sunlight—a deep blue edged with silver spots.

"Can it fly?" said Gaston.

"It hasn't yet," said the girl. "But as soon as its wings stiffen it will try."

"You see," the scientist added, "those little veins through its wings are just now finishing the job of tightening him up. The sticky fluid is passing out of his body through the wing veins."

"A glue job, huh?" said Gaston.

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"That's the general idea," said Dujardin. "It won't take long—"

"Look! He's going to fly," Mademoiselle Butterfly exclaimed.

The shiny little fellow fluttered into the air, and the girl chased after him. Then to my amazement she began to *call* to him—as if the creature had the power to understand!

"Wait! Don't run away from us. We've got to be friends, you know."

By some strange coincidence the butterfly did turn back when she called. But it seemed intent on giving its wings a fair try and it suddenly darted off on a tangent past the trellis, past me—

"Come back!" Mademoiselle Butterfly cried. "Don't go toward *that* window!"

IT all happened too swiftly for words —the battering of the architect's hammer—the shuddering of a huge window frame—and then, right above the butterfly, the loosening of a five-foot section of broken glass.

I sprang toward the butterfly. It settled on a plant directly below the falling glass. I hurled myself over it, flinging my loosened coat up over my head. Then—crash!

The glass splattered down over me. A few sharp gashes prickled my body. But I had done it!

Yes, I had caught myself on hands and knees just in time to save the butterfly from death. As I raised up from the heap of debris, assisted by Gaston and the scientist, the little blue and silver wings fluttered out from under me.

"Oh—thank you, *thank* you, Monsieur," the girl breathed. "You saved his life. I can't tell you how—"

She groped for words, and the warmth of her smile was balm to every bleeding little gash over my body.

"I can't tell you how much this little fellow means to me." She held out her hand toward the butterfly. It climbed up to the crook of her arm, seemed to be looking into her face. She spoke to it softly.

"You're my friend right from the start, aren't you, little fellow? Do you know what your name is? It's *Maurice.*"

"Maurice!" I gasped. Again Gaston nudged me. This was one of the choice times for me to keep quiet.

THE Four Heffles as the quadruplet of butlers was called, made the architect and his two incognito assistants as comfortable as guests.

Gaston and I managed to hold up our end of the work, and the repair job moved along to the architect's satisfaction.

Within a week my acquaintance with Mademoiselle developed into a deep friendship. My being a workman seemed to make no difference to her; at any rate she welcomed my companionship after work hours. I had evidently made a deep impression by saving that butterfly.

But above all I puzzled over the profuse affection which she gave to her little insect pets. There were nine of these "synthetic" butterflies—"Maurice" being the ninth.

One evening as Madeline and I were taking a leisurely swim in the narrows I accosted her about the butterfly's name.

"Why Maurice?"

"After a friend of mine," she said.

"A romance?"

"Disappointments and memories are always romantic," she said.

"Are all of your butterflies named after—er—memories?" I asked.

"You're very unkind," she said. "Is it polite to ask a girl, 'How many men have come to woo you and then run

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away?' That's what you're asking me."

"I'm sorry," I said. "All that really matters to me is that you didn't fall in love with any of them."

"Perhaps I did, though."

"If that were true, they'd never have run away—not unless they were fools."

We were swimming along on our backs, and Madeline pointed up to the steel cable, a black line across the evening sky.

"That was the beginning of a bridge across to the Portugal shore," she said. "Can you imagine a person riding across by pulley?"

"I heard the governor mention something of the kind," I said.

She turned to me, her eyes full of questioning. "Then you've heard about the—the *Test of Dust?*"

I nodded. For a few minutes we swam in silence. Mademoiselle Butterfly was lost in a reverie of far-away thoughts.

"Living here is like living in a different world," she said. "Unless you know the mysteries of Nature that Father and I know, it might be hard to understand—"

"I'd like to try," I said, and I drew her into my arms and kissed her. She looked up into my eyes, half-frightened, then started to swim away. I overtook her, caught her hand, tried to draw her face close to mine. But she shook her head.

"The butterflies," she said.

I LOOKED up to see three or four of her winged pets fluttering past us. "What about them?"

"I — somehow I'd rather they wouldn't *see* me kissing you," she said.

I laughed rather too boisterously. "You're the most curious person I ever met," I said. "Do you think those insects have a sense of modesty?"

"It's silly, isn't it?" she laughed childishly. "I don't know how to explain it, but somehow they're so much like human friends to me—"

"Symbols of your memories," I said rather harshly.

Her eyelids flashed at me and for an instant I thought I had hurt her. But she said, "They had no right to intrude," and as she watched them fly back toward the white-brick mansion I took her in my arms again . . .

That night after dinner Gaston said he wanted to have a talk with me. We sauntered down to the cliff's edge. Abruptly he said, "I think you and I had better clear out."

"Not on your life," I said. "I'm just getting acquainted—"

"You're behaving like a romantic fool," he said. "That's all well enough on the stage, but you're carrying your game too far. The girl's in love with you."

"Say it again," I said. "That's sweet music."

"I've picked up some of her father's view, incidentally," Gaston continued. "He's not too enthusiastic about the various swordsmen, noblemen, and other assorted aristocrats that have come here to woo her. Temperamentally she's more likely to fall in love with a workman like you—"

"So I'm deceiving her, I suppose?"

"You certainly are," said Gaston.

"Yes—yes." I threw a handful of stones into the black sea just to work off nervous energy. Deceit had become my game. I hated to think how Gaston might take it if he knew I was deceiving him too.

I was not a workman, as Madeline thought. I was not the great Raymond Quinton, as Gaston thought. I was simply Louis Ribot, the great Quinton's substitute. But above all else I was a man in love.

"I'm mad about her, Gaston," I said.

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"Even if I don't know the first thing about this mysterious Nature World of hers—"

"It's dangerous," Gaston snapped. "We'd better get away. There's a screw loose on this disappearance business. Have you see that cable across the narrows? How could a man cross that?"

"With a pulley," I said. "It slopes down——"

"How does the pulley get back?"

"I don't know."

"The way this thing figures out," said Gaston savagely, "Nine men have come, fallen in love, tried some sort of test, and failed. Each one of them has been so badly stung, according to the governor, that he has chased off into oblivion the quickest way — by the cable. Tell me, how did they do it? Did the wind blow that pulley back nine times?"

"I don't know."

"Are you going to be the tenth escapee?"

"No."

"What makes you so sure? What makes you think you, the great lover of the stage, won't meet this same defeat? In a few weeks the country will give you up for lost, like Maurice De Brosse. Your admirers will buy some wreaths for you, the papers will publish your obituary—and the Mademoiselle will name a butterfly after you. Is that what you want?"

"No."

"Then what do you want?"

"Mademoiselle Butterfly," I said.

AT THAT Gaston took time out to uncork a line of profanity—the best gems from many a box-office success. It was disillusioning, he moaned, to discover the great Quinton was such a dolt.

"Let's start over," he said, pleading with me like a broken-hearted father. "You came here to restore your ego. You wanted to prove that that cheap swordsman, Maurice De Brosse, couldn't nose out the stage's great lover. All right. She's fallen for you—"

"Do you think so?"

"Rot! What are you doing, rehearsing? I told you—oh, what's the use." He tore his hair and started off. But he whirled back on me. "Answer me three questions. Do you trust the governor?"

"No."

"Now we're getting somewhere. Do you trust the scientist?"

"I don't know . . . What's your third?"

"Just where do you think Maurice is?"

"Maurice the swordsman or Maurice the butterfly?"

"The swordsman, of course."

"Morocco, probably, or Cape Town."

"More rot! Do you know what I think? I think he was *murdered*—he and eight others. Oh, you can laugh. But I'm warning you—"

Gaston broke off. We could hear footsteps approaching along the cliff path. Out of the near-blackness came Mademoiselle Butterfly, her father, and Governor Revel.

"Here they are, father," said the girl. She was wearing her artist's smock. I knew she had expected to help her father tonight with his sculpturing of insect models. So the governor's visit had come unexpectedly.

"I'm showing Governor Revel through the laboratories, messieurs," Dujardin announced, "and my daughter thought you two might care to join us. No?"

"No," said Gaston sharply.

But I assured them that he was only jesting. Of course we would come, with pleasure.

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EMERGING from the darkness into the brightly lighted reception room of the mansion, Gaston and I were careful to follow along at the rear of the party to escape the governor's notice. Though he had failed to recognize us on our incognito arrival, a few days previous, our disguises were too meager to bear close scrutiny.

"This way, messieurs," said Monsieur Dujardin, leading us in the first of the laboratory chambers. There was a slight nervousness in the scientist's manner, though at the time I thought nothing of it.

Monsieur Pash joined us, and the six of us proceeded through the maze of rooms, the architect and the governor following close after the scientist; Gaston and I accompanying Madeline.

So this was Mademoiselle Butterfly's world! I tingled to the fingertips with interest. Mystery upon mystery unfolded before us. All of us asked questions—even Gaston. He must have forgotten his silly suspicions about murders.

In one room Gaston picked up what appeared to be a high-powered flash lantern. He was surprised to discover that it was already on. He turned it to cast a dim amber beam across his face.

Dujardin warned him gently. "I wouldn't take too much of that beam if I were you—unless you want to *grow.*"

"Shorty could use a little more size," Monsieur Pash laughed.

"That beam is working on those tadpoles, to hasten their development," said Dujardin. He replaced the amber flash-lantern. Its sickly glow bathed the dark and slimy inmates of the little glass aquarium. "There's much waiting to be done in the way of ray experimentation. The powers of this particular lantern, which I've just completed after two years of crude trial and error, are still largely an unknown quantity—"

"Unknown to your fellow scientists?" the governor asked, "or—"

"Unknown even to me. You've heard something of my theories before, governor," said Dujardin, "and you know that my basic hypothesis, which caused my fellow scientists to establish me in this fine sunlighted laboratory, is the hypothesis that men and guinea pigs and earthworms and hyenas are all cousins."

"Hyenas—that's good," said the governor, laughing pompously. "I've known plenty of human hyenas in my lifetime."

"Underlying my theory," the scientist continued, "is the indisputable fact that all life, plant or animal, thrives upon water, earth, air, and sunlight. A man forgets that he is actually a water-dwelling animal, encased in a crust of skin. But when our friend here—" he pointed to me, "suffered some minor glass cuts the other day, I demonstrated to him that he is a cousin, far-removed, to the minutiae that swarm the seas."

I HALF-RESENTED the comparison until I noticed how enthralled Madeline was. She smiled at me as if I were one of nature's wonders, and I must have swelled with pride. Gaston made a sour face.

By far the most extravagant idea—and the scientist admitted it was highly hypothetical—was his contention that every specialized form of life, such as a human being, or a frog, or a hyena, contained the capacity to *retreat through its stages of development, back to the point of separation from other forms of life* . . . and having retreated, it might be made to *re-develop* along new lines.

Again the governor broke in with his bumptious humor. He knew some

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brutes of politicians that proved the point. They had *backslid*, he snorted, and then gone and *turned hyena.*

"And I've known some jackasses, too!" Governor Revel laughed uproariously and slapped the scientist on the back. "A great idea, Dujardin. Human hyenas, jackasses, and what about a chameleon or two? You know—the little lizards that change color so they won't be seen against their background?"

"What about them?" said Dujardin embarrassedly.

"Maybe we've got a couple of them among us, eh? Turn on some brighter lights, Dujardin, and let's have a look."

"Oh-oh," Gaston whispered. "Our game's up."

Dujardin must have known this was coming. His nervousness had betrayed it. Madeline, however, wore an expression of puzzlement. The architect was a perfect blank. But, obviously enough, Governor Revel had come here to expose us.

"Well, well, well!" the governor exclaimed, gazing at Gaston and me under the full light. "My old friends, the actors! Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Gaston, the celebrated comedian, and Raymond Quinton, the most famous lover of the French stage!"

Gaston and I did the only thing we could do under the circumstances. We locked arms and took a deep bow.

"Guilty!" said Gaston. And I added, "At your service."

"I told you so." Governor Revel gave the scientist a wink. "My chauffeur caught their identity the day they arrived, but I needed time to be convinced." He turned his victorious smile on Gaston and me. "Well, my friends, you are again most welcome to the island of Fraise. And what, pray tell, brings you here incognito?"

"Quinton is learning a new trade," Gaston cracked.

"Love has been called by funny names before," the governor laughed, placing his hand on my shoulder. "A very clever hoax, Monsieur Quinton. Does the stage's great lover have to have an assistant when he woos a fair lady? Perhaps Monsieur Gaston writes the lines for you to recite, yes?"

MY SHOULDER twitched out of his hand. I saw that Madeline was annoyed—whether at me for my hoax, or the governor for uncovering it, I could not tell. Red was clouding my eyes. I exploded with a quick blast of anger.

"When or whom I woo is nobody's business, least of all Governor Revel's."

"Please!" Madeline cried.

"Forgive us, Mademoiselle," the governor said suavely, "but you must be protected from this cheap trick. Obviously our famous actor has heard that your *aristocratic* suitors couldn't win you. So he comes under false colors, thinking to gain your favor. But if he were really sincere—"

All self-restraint left me. I whirled, caught the governor by the shoulders, thrust him back against the wall so roughly that his wide jaw sagged. At the same instant I caught a warning hiss from Gaston, and turned to see the four Heffles enter the room.

"What's the frame-up?" I snarled, releasing the red-faced governor. "Whatever it is, I defy anyone to say I'm not sincere. I don't care who you are—governor, scientist, or phoney butler—"

"This has gone far enough, Governor!" Dujardin spoke quietly, but there was something electrical about his words. For a tense moment the glares crisscrossed. What he and the governor and the four Heffles were silently saying to each other I could only won-

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der. In my surge of temper I jumped at a passing suspicion—*the governor must be jealous! Every man who fell for Mademoiselle Butterfly must be his sworn enemy!*

If so, perhaps Gaston was right. Murder was the answer.

Little did I guess the actual complications. Gaston was tugging at my sleeve, whispering, "Let's get out of here, Quinton."

But it was the governor who broke the deadlock. With mysterious finality he said, "Well, Dujardin, there you are. The rest is up to you. I'll go. Good night."

He turned and walked off abruptly, and all four of the butlers escorted him out.

There was an awkward silence. The architect, completely dumbfounded by the strange turn of events, excused himself. There would be a big day's work tomorrow, and if Gaston and I were still his assistants, he said, we'd better turn in and get a night's sleep.

Gaston waved his hands helplessly and followed, leaving me alone with Madeline and her father. Again there was a tense silence. Then Dujardin said:

"I'm going to take you at your word, Monsieur. I would not have believed that the great Raymond Quinton would ever fall in love with my daughter—"

HE PAUSED, studying me with his kindly penetrating eyes.

"Who I am makes no difference," I declared. "I'm in love with Madeline. I'll always be in love with her. No earthquakes or wars—or jealous governors can change that."

"He can't be jealous!" Madeline said, brushing her eyes with a handkerchief.

"You may forget Governor Revel's seemingly rude interest in our affairs," said the scientist. "Whether you are an actor, a bricklayer, or a candlestick maker doesn't matter *in our world*. The thing that matters is whether you can withstand a particular test—"

His trembling fingers raised to his brow, hiding his eyes. I waited. But he seemed reluctant to go on. One of the Heffles passed quietly through the room. The scientist cleared his throat and continued.

"We call it the *Test of Dust*."

"If it's a proof of my love," I said, "I can withstand it."

"It's more than that,' Dujardin said slowly. "It's a test of courage—vision—and other qualities not easily named—a test of one's kinship with Nature. I can assure you that Madeline shall not marry a man who is unequal to this challenge."

I looked to Madeline, caught the light of eager hope in her eyes.

"Very well," I said. "When do I start?"

"Tonight," said Dujardin. "At once."

WE DESCENDED to a basement room. Dujardin took pains to leave all doors open, mentioning that the way was open for me to back out whenever the test became severe.

"This door marked *EXIT*," he said, as we paused in a brightly lighted circular alcove, "opens toward the narrows. In case you are interested, there is a steel cable which leads across to the Portugal shore."

"I won't be interested," I said.

"This door,' he pointed to the deep-set panel constructed of bark-covered slabs, "leads to the *Test of Dust*. Madeline will show you the way. And now . . . I leave you to your fate."

Before his retreating footsteps had died away, I had taken Madeline in my arms. Unsmiling, she looked up at me.

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"I hope—I pray to God that you win!" she breathed. "Until I learned that you were Raymond Quinton, I was terribly in love with you."

"And now?"

"If you survive the test—" She finished by slowly nodding.

For one lingering dizzy moment I kissed her. There was nothing of the actor about me during that moment. Earnestly, feverishly, I knew, if I had not known it before, that I was ready to defy hell itself to win her.

She drew away from me, brushed her hair lightly, tilted her head with determination. "Now you must forget about me," she said softly. "This is the door."

On the panel of bark-covered slabs there was an inscription, a familiar Biblical quotation, neatly carved: "DUST THOU ART."

Three ominous words on the doorway to my fate!

I opened the door, propped a stone against it. All of the underground tunnels, Madeline said, found their way back to this brightly lighted alcove.

Hazy blue light wafted up like a luminous mist through the shadowy walls. Madeline was a silhouette before me, leading the way down the winding incline. Soon the bluish mists grew brighter. Mercury tubes appeared along the dark ceilings.

"In case the war spreads over Europe," Madeline said, "these treasures will all be preserved from bursting shells."

"Treaures?" I thought of jewels and precious metals.

"These specimens you are about to see," she said, "are our treasures—intricate models and dioramas that I've helped father mold. They tell the secrets of his knowledge."

A long straight passage opened before us and the first line of dioramas came into view—scores if not hundreds of them. They were like an endless line of miniature window displays along a sidewalk, their colored lights glowing on the black wall opposite.

WE MUST have devoted three hours to the study of these works of art. The secrets that they revealed need not be related in this record, for the telling could never do justice to the actual models.

Thus, for example, it is easy enough to state that the intricate skeletons of rabbits, turtles, and fish have *some* basic similarities; but actually to *see* these similarities in bona fide models is a much more vivid experience.

And yet, above and beyond the seeing is the fuller *appreciation* of the dramatic wonders involved—an appreciation that came home to me as I listened to Madeline. She was veritably on fire with her subject. To anyone with the slightest degree of imagination, this chain of nature revelations would be as novel and as shocking as a lift into another world.

"I can't see why anyone should be rebuffed by this so-called *Test of Dust,*" I said. "It's the most glorious array of wonders I ever witnessed."

"Doesn't it anger you?'

"Anger me! Why should it?'

"Maybe you're less aristocratic, at heart, than the previous guests of this maze," said Madeline. "Some puffed-up egos can't stand to be deflated. Doesn't it infuriate you to be reminded that your bodily cells divide no differently from those of a snake?"

"Not at all," I laughed.

"Some temperaments," said Madeline, "can't bear it. Some aristocrats have been led to believe that their blood is bluer than a common man's. Figuratively speaking, of course. Actually, blood is blue only when it is impure.

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But these so-called blue-bloods usually see red if you remind them that they have a few properties in common with an earthworm. They do exactly what an earthworm does when it bumps into something disagreeable—they crawl the other way."

"It isn't very flattering," I said.

SHE looked at me intently, as if wondering whether I was thinking of crawling in the other direction.

"Ill leave you now," she said, as we turned a right angle. "This next row of exhibitions can be understood only if you study them carefully. I warn you that they deal *not with established fact, but with a theory far removed from scientific fact:* the theory that forms of life may be made to *revert* to earlier, simpler forms, and then, perhaps, be forced to *re-develop* along new lines."

"Do you believe the theory?"

"I'm waiting for further proofs," said Mademoiselle Butterfly noncommittally. "But my father is completely convinced. And now—for the present—I leave you to your own destiny."

It was a curious sensation, then, to see Mademoiselle Butterfly turning to leave me, walking on ahead through the rifle-barrel straight passage that I was to follow. For this new avenue, if I had calculated the right angle turns correctly, was the third side of a rectangular tunnel that would lead back to the Dust-Thou-Art doorway.

I watched her until she finally disappeared at the distant turn.

So this was the test that made aristocratic blood run cold! The absurdity of it. Obviously there was nothing to fear. I moved along the wall of windows slowly, thoughtfully.

Each new demonstration was more fanciful than the last. I was dizzy now with the curiosity of it all—like a child being told all the mysteries of the earth, sun, and stars in a single night.

Shortly I observed something very puzzling. The windows were diminishing in height. The change was very gradual, but without exception each window squatted a bit closer to the floor than the last.

Soon I was bending down to get the full effect of each little window display. The row of dioramas stretched ahead with an effect of distance that was deceptive, for the shrinking dimensions played tricks on my eyes. The tunnel's ceiling seemed to be rising to loftier heights.

I moved along on my hands and knees. At last I came to a sharp turn in the passage—*and there stood Madeline.*

"I waited for you," she said, smiling down at me. "I saw that you were still coming, so—"

"I'm following through to the end," I declared. Strange as it may seem, I didn't rise to my feet. I could see another series of low-set lights in the new avenue ahead.

"There's a dangerous pit within a few steps," she said. "Be careful."

SHE led the way slowly. I crawled along, viewing the little windows in the walls. Perhaps we were near sea level. At least we came to a narrow stream of brilliant green waters, glittering through a break in the floor.

The jagged break grew wider, the footpath narrowed. The brilliant green of the waters cast a weird lambency across the clay walls.

"Slippery footsteps ahead," Madeline warned, "but there's a rope to hold onto."

The gash widened into a liquid filled pit some twenty-five feet in diameter. Madeline rounded it with practiced step, catching the rope that hung from

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rings in the low ceiling.

Still stooping, I tried to follow in her footsteps.

My step was not so lucky. I slipped, lost my balance, reached for the rope. But its slack slipped from my grasp, for Madeline had caught it, at the same moment, beyond the next ring. I splashed into the pit.

She looked back, and I fancied I saw an expression of disappointment. "Do you need any help?"

"I'm all right," I said, catching hold of the rocky ledge. The water—if water it was—sucked against my body like something alive—like an octopus with a thousand tentacles attacking me everywhere at once.

I scrambled out onto the solid tunnel floor.

Mademoiselle Butterfly bent down, handed me a handkerchief to swab my face.

"Listen!" she said sharply. "Did you hear someone calling?"

Out of the hollow silence there came a dim prolonged echo of an "O-o-o-oh!"

It came twice again. It seemed to come from neither direction—or perhaps from both. It might have been someone calling, "Hello!" or, "Quinton!" but the consonants were lost in distant echoes.

Naturally I thought of Gaston. It would be like him to try to follow me.

But Madeline evidently thought it was her father.

"I've stayed with you too long," she said. "I must hurry."

Once more I watched her as she departed down the long straight tunnel. It was a scene I was destined to recall, in the light of subsequent events. I distinctly saw her walking away from me, walking as fast as she could without running, passing the low-set little windows whose light flicked across her ankles. Finally the lights seemed to run out and she was swallowed up in darkness.

WHAT happened from then on was like a nightmare too weird for words.

My soaked flesh was undergoing strange sensations, hardly to be classified as pain, yet utterly unlike any normal feeling. I seemed to be shrinking.

The windows, however, were growing much smaller, confusing my sense of proportions. Again I began to concentrate on the wonderful displays—dainty little show-case specimens of reptiles and birds. I was strangely attracted. Here were fish, birds, and winged lizards all brought together in a single structure study. It was well worth crawling on your belly to see.

Yes, I was crawling. *And it was easy!* My abdominal muscles were responding so well that I felt a strange and unnatural power. Had that green fluid given me some special strength? I felt lighter, smaller, and yet far more agile.

These changes might have been frightfully disturbing but for the little window displays. Before my eyes the crawling habits of caterpillars were analyzed. For an organism that has to crawl (even as I was having to crawl) the bodily structure of the caterpillar was very advantageous.

Suddenly I discovered that a ceiling was close over my head. Surely I was coming toward the end of the passage—But, no. Madeline had walked upright! Something was wrong here. Had I been sidetracked? I tried to turn back.

But this was no place to turn. The ceiling, a series of flaps, slipped over my back readily enough as long as I went forward, but caught me fast when I tried to reverse my direction.

For a few minutes I stopped, fight-

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ing off a panic of fear. As I moved forward the valve effect of the ceiling extended around the walls to the floor beneath my abdomen. It gave my whole body a sensation of being ridged or humped, like a tight string of beads. My arms and legs must have become paralyzed. They felt as if they had shrunk into nothing.

Occasionally a spray of the green liquid would shower down over me, perhaps from hidden springs in the wall. Then the shrinking sensation would come over me again, and I would be able to move forward more easily.

At last there were no more little windows to light my way. I was groping along through absolute darkness, crawling up an inclined passage that pressed in ever tighter coils around my beaded body.

In the midst of this physical torment I heard the hollow echo of a "Hallooo-oo!" Gaston's voice!

I tried to answer. To my utter horror my voice had gone back on me. All I could manage was a weak, piping little "Hello-o-o!" that was less than the chirping of a cricket.

Once I wormed about enough to see a dim amber gleam from somewhere far back of me—enough to convince me Gaston was on the search with a lantern. By this time I was in a frenzy to get out. Gaston was right—this was a game of murder!

The sickening truth struck me like that terror of terrors—*the crushing of a heel!* Why the suitors of Mademoiselle Butterfly should be murdered was more than I could guess. But murder this must be, contrived by the ingenuity of that innocent-mannered scientist.

"H-E-L-L-O-O-, Q-U-I-N-T-O-N-!"

"Hello! Hello! Hello!"

My voice seemed so tiny and insignificant I couldn't hope to be heard.

Gaston finally passed out of hearing. He must have seen his way to the tunnel's outlet—the way I had missed. *But he had left the lantern.* Through the porous walls that enclosed me I could see a faint amber glow. And the gentle comforting warmth that seeped through me was my last sensation before my consciousness gave way to death-like blackness.

AT LAST I awoke and crept forth into daylight.

That sleep had been good, but too long. Many days long, I was sure.

I walked forth weakly, giddily. The wind threatened to blow me over. My instinctive sense of balance was sharp—extraordinarily so—but I felt the need of limbering up my stiff muscles. I was all folded up, so to speak.

For a long time I stood motionless. Everything was too dazzlingly bright. Where was I?

I was standing on the edge of an outcropping rock which resembled a gigantic chunk of pink taffy candy. I had just emerged from one of the caverns which honeycombed that rock. Towering above me was a mammoth vine which wove upward through an immense white trellis. On that vine were the most magnificent roses—

Instinctively I wanted to fly!

Instinctively I knew there was food in those roses.

But instinct and human intelligence crashed head-on. I shuddered. The unspeakably dreadful thing had happened. I knew it on the instant—and my shadow proved it.

For minutes I stood there trembling. But all the while I could feel the fluid of my body surging outward through the veins of my wings, filling me with power and confidence. *I wanted to fly!*

But in the very same breath I wanted something else—a sinister something

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that belongs in the human catalog of wants—*revenge*.

Thus before I had even tried my wings, or crept to the window to observe what I looked like in my new form, I found myself torn apart, figuratively, like a machine with two motors pulling in opposite directions.

The butterfly instincts cried out for gayety and sunshine. The human feelings revolted against this heinous crime of science.

As soon as I could adjust myself to the vast proportions of the flower garden and laboratory walls that surrounded me, I marched forth for that memorable first look at myself. A basement window became my mirror.

AS A butterfly I was a giant. My wings were as large as any I ever saw on a bona fide butterfly. They were a deep red blending into purple close to my body.

But I was far more than a butterfly. My body was as large and plump as the body of any moth. And yet it was human in form. I possessed well-formed arms and legs and a round little head with a doll-like face. But, curiously enough, in addition to the human tongue in my mouth I possessed a butterfly tongue—a long hollow tube which I could uncoil from under my nose whenever I wanted to suck the nectar out of flowers.

I fed myself, tried my wings in a momentous first flight, learned that I could camouflage myself from the curious eyes of bona fide butterflies by hiding among brown leaves with my wings closed.

Presently I heard a conversation from one of the laboratory rooms and I crept along the window sill to listen.

"Please, Madeline," the scientist was pleading. "Don't be so despondent. You haven't smiled for days. Cheer up, can't you? We've got so many interesting experiments to do. . . . But I haven't a heart for anything when you're so blue."

Bitterness swept through me. "Interesting experiments!" I thought. "Dastardly crimes—luring men to these laboratories—transforming them into insects—*for what?* For the fanciful pleasure of Mademoiselle Butterfly! All because she loves butterflies!"

I was trembling to the fingertips—yes, and to the wing-tips! The mad desire for revenge was already chasing murder schemes through my tiny brain.

I listened. Madeline was moaning softly. Was it possible that she suffered an attack of conscience after playing her part in one of these vicious experiments?

I moved farther along the window sill, hoping to catch a glimpse of her face. Unfortunately a stack of books cut off my view. Slowly, cautiously I crawled through the open window into the room, down onto the table, past the heap of books.

I stopped short and my wings automatically folded. I had come within sight of Dujardin. He sat within three feet of me, resting one arm on the edge of the table. Like everything about me he looked gigantic. But it was his expression that fascinated me. Strange, I thought, that a man can appear so innocent and yet be so cruel.

"Do you know what's going to happen today, Madeline?" he said in a low sympathetic voice. "You're going to have another new synthetic butterfly . . . One that you can call Raymond Quin—"

"Please, father, don't say it! I can't stand the thought!"

"Calm yourself, child. You're my partner, you know. My world is your world. My scientific discoveries are yours."

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HE SAID it with compassion, and yet to me it represented the bluntest admission of cruelty—an admission that Madeline was as guilty as he. If I had had any doubts on this score before, these words erased them. How my passions mocked me!

But now Madeline spoke, in a chill hurt voice, and her words hurled me back into confusion.

"Father," she said, "you have always told me that. I've wanted to be your partner, to share all your knowledge. But you have kept secrets from me."

Dujardin looked down at the desk intently. I slipped back out of sight. Then through a crack among the books I could see Madeline's beautiful face, the beads that hung at her throat, her trembling fingers. My hatred melted. It was not only her beauty, nor her tear-filled eyes; it was a magnetic radiance—something subtle that my butterfly instincts sensed—something that connoted friendliness.

"Father," she pursued. "I want to go on sharing your work, but you must answer my questions. I won't be put off this time. The disappointment is too deep."

"Madeline, you're pampering yourself. After all, he *was* the great Quinton. You've read about him. You know he has been a ruthless heart-crusher—"

"*Why* did he fail the *Test of Dust*, father? He didn't lack courage. Nor understanding. And he did love me. I know it! . . . Oh, *why* did he have to submit to the test in the first place?"

I crept back to the corner of the stack of books to gaze at Dujardin. He looked old, and his kindly face was a study in turmoil. His eyes seemed to be boring holes through the table.

"And why," Madeline's voice continued, "must these four walking statues always live with us, watching over our shoulders, listening to us talk, turning our home into a concentration camp? Why, father, won't you ever tell me? I know there must be something dreadful that you're hiding. If so, I want to share it."

"Madeline, my child, I think we are about through with the four Heffles. I've called the governor and asked him to arrange passages for them—"

His eyes, lifting slowly, came to a stop—*on me*.

I FLINCHED, and my instincts told me to fly. Instead, I froze in my tracks. But it was vain to hope that he didn't see me. His eyes widened, his lips parted. I could fairly feel his astonished gaze.

He rose slowly, and a wondrous amazement lighted his face. If I had been in sympathy with him I might have seen a glorious victory in his expression.

I ducked out of his sight, crept along the back of the books.

Over the top of the stack his arm suddenly appeared — causing me to crouch with fear—and closed the window. I heard him moving about, closing all the windows and doors.

"What's the matter, father?" Madeline asked.

"Matter, dear?" The exuberance in his voice was ill-suppressed. "I've just discovered—I mean, I've just *recalled*—"

"Yes?"

"I know now what became of that lost lantern—the one I used to mature the tadpoles."

"You've been worrying about that lantern for days," said Madeline.

"Gaston must have taken it to use for a flashlight the night that Raymond Quinton left us," said Dujardin. "You'll find it sitting on the floor near the end of the *Test* tunnel. Please go

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get it at once."

Madeline left. Dujardin closed the door after her. Then he reached to the wall for a butterfly net.

And while his back was turned, I obeyed my instinct to take flight. I leaped up on a shelf and hid behind some bottles.

"QUINTON! . . . Raymond Quinton! . . . Where are you hiding? . . . Come out. I want to talk with you."

With his butterfly-net poised in his right hand, the scientist paced back and forth, his burning eyes combing the walls, the floor, the nooks and crannies among the scientific apparatus.

"Quinton, wherever you are, I know you can hear me. Come out. I've *got* to talk with you. Everything depends upon it."

He mopped perspiration from his cheeks and the backs of his hands.

"Quinton!"

Desperation was in his voice. He laid down the net and began moving books, test tubes, *bottles*.

"Oh, there you are! Thank goodness. I was afraid you'd got out before I closed the window. That would be dangerous. You're the answer to a scientist's dream, but you mustn't fall into the wrong hands. Do you understand me?"

Between two bottles I peered out at him defiantly, but I was trembling from toes to wing-tips.

"Listen to me, Quentin," he said, drawing closer. "The four Heffles mustn't see you. And Governor Revel—"

A knock sounded at the door.

"Stay where you are," Dujardin whispered.

Did he think I was in danger of running off, with all the doors and windows closed?

Well, I was. Hiding behind those bottles had given me ideas. My brain might be small but it was on fire with purpose of my own. A bottle of poison would be all I needed to wreak my revenge. But I mustn't be captured.

The scientist opened the door long enough to admit Gaston.

"I've come to say goodbye," said Gaston. He was dressed for travel, but he removed his hat, opened his coat, and started to open a window.

"Please!" the scientist restrained him. "I'm keeping a certain temperature."

"Yes, and I'm running a temperature," said Gaston. "This place is a bake-oven. But it's all for science, I suppose."

"It's all for science," Dujardin smiled, breaking off to give me a stern look.

Nobody seemed to know it, but I was yelling, *"Gaston! Gaston!"* at the top of my voice. What a fate! My shrill little notes must have been too high for the human eardrum to hear.

NEVERTHELESS, I meant for Gaston to see me. I flew down from the shelf—and Dujardin swung the net over me with a deft wrist. He tossed me—net and all—into a large drawer and closed it. It all happened so swiftly and easily that Gaston didn't even see me. If he had he might have paid no attention, for he was preoccupied with his own affairs.

"I may have judged you too harshly, Dujardin," he was saying. "I'll admit I was pretty much wrought up on the night that Quinton disappeared."

"You thought that I had sent him away?" said the scientist.

"I thought worse things than that. You see, in the first place I couldn't conceive of Quinton's failing in any fair test. In the second place I was sure

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that if he did fail, he wouldn't sneak off the island by cable. And I still don't understand his doing it. But he must have."

"What do you mean?" said the scientist.

From the rattle I knew that Gaston must have been taken a newspaper from his pocket.

"If this news story is correct," said Gaston, "Raymond Quinton is now in a hospital, wounded from an air crash."

"Ugh?" the scientist gulped.

"He flew a pursuit plane during the march on Paris. He must have reported within twenty-four hours after he left here. And you know how fast things have gone to pieces."

"M-m-m."

"So I'm heading back to the continent at once. He may be in bad shape. I want to see him."

"Yes—so do I."

"Would you come along?" Gaston asked eagerly.

"Ugh—no—no. I couldn't think of it. My experiments, you know. I'm in a dilemma—"

"I thought so. You're all needles and pins. But this damned room is so warm—" There were sounds of opening windows and Gaston concluded, "There, you'll feel better."

Then a taxi honked and one of the Heffles trooped in to help Gaston off. The scientist made him promise he would return with a report on Raymond Quinton's condition. Gaston promised and departed.

The scientist opened the drawer, squinted his eyes at me dubiously. He got a magnifying glass and looked me over from all angles. He was troubled.

"I wish I knew," he said, "whether you can understand me."

While he was muttering over me, Madeline returned and the lantern with the amber beam was in her hand.

"How did you know I'd find it there, father?" she asked.

His back was turned to her and he began to wad the net around me.

It was pointing straight at the lower end of that pink stone you turned into a butterfly hatchery," she continued. "You don't suppose the beam will have any effect on the new butterfly you promised me?"

"Come here, Madeline," said the scientist gravely. "I've something to show you."

MADELINE bent over the net eagerly, then, seeing me, drew back in amazement. I trembled, uncertain whether the sight of me was repulsive. Her shocked expression turned into delight.

"What a curious little fellow!"

"That's what the lantern did," said the scientist.

I flapped my wings and tried to get out.

"Oh. Isn't he the clever little thing. Why, he's a regular little man."

The scientist caught his breath as if afraid to speak.

"Father, how ever did you do it? I think it's wonderful! Aren't you pleased?"

"Should I be?" he said.

"But of course! It's your proof, at last! If you've taken an ordinary butterfly chrysalis and made it develop—"

"We won't discuss the methods just yet, my dear. I don't want you to tell anyone—"

"Oh, we can't keep it a secret! This is a discovery! You'll be famous! When you tell your fellow scientists—"

"I'll tell them nothing," said Dujardin stoutly. "Their respect is more important to me than anything else in the world. I'd die before I'd lose it."

"What are you talking' about?"

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Madeline managed to take her eyes off me, turning them challengingly on her father. "Can there be anything disreputable about this? You've treated a butterfly chrysalis in a new way and created a new creature—and he's cunning! Look at him. He's going to be my friend right from the start."

"Madeline, listen to me," Dujardin said severely. "In this house we never know when the butlers are eavesdropping. They mustn't learn of this. Never. Do you hear?"

"Yes."

"And the governor—you mustn't tell him either."

"I won't tell. There's only one person in the world that I might tell."

"You mean—"

"Raymond Quinton. He would understand, father. He understood everything in the *Test-of-Dust*. I know he did. I could never keep a secret from him. That's how it is when you love someone deeply—"

"So you loved him deeply." Dujardin's thoughts seemed to be a hundred miles away. He became silent. I knew better than Madeline the deep conflict that tormented him. Not until Gaston returned from the continent would he know whether I was Raymond Quinton or some freak of nature that had sprung from an unknown source.

Madeline murmured dreamily that she was thinking of writing a letter to Raymond Quinton.

Her father advised against it. The mail service was so badly disrupted from the march on Paris, he said, that a letter would never reach Quinton, wherever he might be.

Disconsolate, Madeline decided to go to her butterflies; but instead, she began talking to me, lifting my net to admire my bright colors as I fluttered under her hands.

"You're a little wonder!" she said.

Just then Z. Heffle stepped into the room.

MADELINE gathered my net close in her hands to keep me out of sight, and catching a cue from her father she thrust me into the big open drawer.

"The governor to see you," said Z. Heffle.

Madeline went out, when Governor Revel marched in. The doors were closed. Evidently the governor desired a private conversation with Dujardin alone. I wondered if I had been forgotten. Fortunately, I hadn't given away my advantage—that I could hear and understand every word that was said.

"You're a bit premature, aren't you, Dujardin, trying to send your four butlers away?"

"I've finished," said Dujardin bitterly. "You can call off your watchdogs."

"You don't have to be uncivil," Governor Revel's voice took on that satiny tone that I never trusted. "If you've fulfilled your end of the bargain, our beautiful friendship goes on untarnished. But I've a suspicion," his words suddenly struck out like pointed icicles, "that not all of those ten murders have been committed."

"Governor Revel! What are you saying!" These words were so much camouflage, I was certain, for the scientist followed up with a tense whisper. "Some one might be listening."

"What's the difference?" Governor Revel snapped. "The Heffles know. If your daughter gets in on it, that's her own fault. All right. You remember our bargain—"

"It wasn't a bargain!" Dujardin's words were like steel.

"I put the Heffles here to *make* it a

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bargain," the governor snarled. "Fortunately I had you squirming. You had made one little scientific mistake that involved a life and I knew it. And I knew you were in a sweat to make your fellow scientists think you had a clear record."

"So you had me," said Dujardin coldly. "And you browbeat me into doing murders for you. Do we have to go into all that?"

"It's my theme song," said the governor in gloating tones. "It's my bedtime prayer. It's my Sunday dessert. Ten political enemies on the continent! They had rubbed me in the dust, the damned aristocrats! They had tried to hold me down!"

"And you became governor in spite of them." The scientist seemed to be forecasting the coming line of a familiar phonograph record.

"I—the hater of aristocrats—became this island's governor in spite of them! But every one of the damned hyenas had a nephew or a *son*—and I didn't forget."

"So you plotted revenge."

"Yes, and you were the man to help me. I learned about that natural pit of green water, somewhere in the tunnels under this hill—green water that would shrink and shrivel any creature—*what was that noise?*"

THE noise was my scrambling around inside the butterfly net. I was going to get out of this prison or break my wings trying. I had heard enough. If there was any way in the world to give this information to Madeline—to tell her that her father had been framed—

"There's something in that drawer," the governor growled.

"A mouse most likely. See here, Governor Revel, I'm terribly busy. If you've come to gloat about getting rid of your enemies without staining your hands—"

"*Have* I got rid of them?" The governor shouted it so fiercely my antennae shook. "How do I know you've put these ten deals over? What evidence do I have?"

"What evidence do you want?"

The governor disregarded the question. He was raving, now. "How do I know that you haven't hoaxed me, the same as you've hoaxed your daughter, telling her that her lovers escaped by the cable. How do I know but what they *did* escape by the cable?"

This was too much for me. I gulped. The cold facts were coming thick and fast, now. Almost faster than I could swallow them. And yet I could readily believe, when I recalled Gaston's doubts about the cable story, that this was simply a convenient falsehood for Madeline's benefit. Yes, and for the benefit of all who might try to raise a fuss about the mysterious disappearance of ten men.

While Dujardin struggled to evade the charge that he must have known was coming, I managed to crawl out of the net and slip down over the rear end of the drawer, dropping softly to the floor.

I picked my path carefully, crept to a hiding place within a foot of a doorsill. The door fit badly, and I had an even chance of squeezing through.

By this time the governor was confronting Dujardin with the same jarring newspaper story that Gaston had found.

"It says Raymond Quinton is in a hospital," the governor spat. "Quinton was the last man on my list. Several days ago we sent him into the *Test of Dust*—and you, my fine-feathered friend, checked him off. What kind of liar does this make you?"

I couldn't have chosen a moment of

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colder silence for my climb through the door. But I wouldn't be seen, for I knew that the two men were glaring at each other.

By springing my wings ever so slightly I made it. I was out—free—

But a huge rough hand clapped down over me—I had forgotten to beware of eavesdroppers! Within the fingers of W. Heffle I was again a prisoner.

W. HEFFLE blinked at me approximately twenty times. Then he kicked on the door and grunted, "Let me in. I got something to show you."

The scientist may or may not have welcomed this intrusion. With or without me, he was in a spot.

One Heffle called another until the four of them crowded into the room, joining the governor and Dujardin in gazing at me. Dujardin placed me in an empty fishbowl and laid a piece of thick plate glass over the top, leaving a crack for air.

I was pained to have them glaring at me, making a side-show out of me. But in spite of my humiliation I realized by this time that *my* feelings were of secondary importance. Monsieur Dujardin was in a hot spot. I no longer misjudged him. He had been fighting a set of ruthless criminals all these years. Yes, and single-handed. But they were closing in on him with a vengeance at last.

What Dujardin had done to me, and to nine other men that the governor had tricked into coming under Madeline's spell, was crime enough to leave an unforgivable blot on science. No one could deny that. But the fact remained that Dujardin had not murdered us.

His ingenuity had contrived to keep us alive, at least.

Yes, at the risk of his own life, under the very eyes of those four stiff owl-eyed thugs, he had dared to defy orders, and had gotten away with it.

Moreover, he'd been clever enough to hide the whole game from his daughter, had kept her in a realm of beauty and idealism, away from the sordid. No wonder her innocence was such that even butterflies could instinctively feel her warmth and friendship.

But what would happen to her when the scientist's game exploded? I dreaded to think how horrified she would be. She must be warned, before this ugly business broke in her face.

These thoughts flooded through my tiny brain as I waited amid the stifling air of the fish bowl.

The sight of me had uncorked perturbed speculations in the mind of Governor Revel. He paced the floor, snapping his fingers, champing his wide jaws. Everytime around he stopped for another look at me.

"So that's what comes of your science," he growled. "Along with all your baloney-stuffed lectures you can really turn out something. Um-m-m . . . I think you're pulling a fast one, Dujardin."

THE Heffles grunted their agreement. The scientist thumbed through some notes absently. Even when they prodded him with sharp questions he made a fair show of ignoring them.

I knew well enough that Dujardin was confused. After that news account of Raymond Quinton, he couldn't be sure about me.

But he kept his mouth shut. He was wise enough to know that the governor was confused too.

"Have you Heffles seen any other specimens like that?" Governor Revel asked.

The Heffles hadn't. No synthetic butterfly had ever been developed along these lines before. They were sure of that.

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"Do you Heffles know how he goes about it to develop one of the damned things?"

The four butlers had to admit they didn't. The scientific processes were too complicated. They could never be sure what the scientist was working on from one time to the next.

"A fine quartet you are," the governor snorted, "letting this happen right under your eyes. You'd better take care that he doesn't mix a couple of you fellows into butterfly batter—*ugh!*"

The governor's words broke off with a husky grunt, as if someone had slugged him in the chest. "Wait a minute, boys, maybe I have an idea there. Tell me, how often have these synthetic butterflies appeared?"

Dujardin, of course, refused to answer. But the four Heffles began to pool their observations on the matter. They quickly stumbled onto a formula.

There had been nine butterflies in all, they agreed—ten, counting me—and when one of them had been killed during Maurice De Brosse's duel, they remembered, both the scientist and the girl had been terribly upset.

"The point is," said Y. Heffle, getting hot on the trail that the governor was after, "the girl has got a new butterfly for every boy friend that got cancelled."

"Now we're getting places, aren't we, Dujardin?" The governor smiled evilly at the scientist. "Maybe some of your lectures about organisms that revert and then redevelop didn't go over my head after all."

"Purely hypothesis," said the scientist dryly, pretending to miss the other's implication, devoting all his attention, apparently, to the marking of chemical formulas on a scratch pad.

"How soon after the disappearance of each of my *special friends*," the governor drew out the words with luxurious sarcasm, "did these synthetic butterflies come on the scene?"

AGAIN the Heffles lacked exact information. Several days, they were sure, in each instance.

"Then this damned little varmint," the governor said savagely "is in all probabilities a certain nephew of a certain cursed aristocrat who once threw mud in my face. The tenth number on my revenge list. *This is Raymond Quinton the actor.*"

Dujardin looked up and laughed in a mocking tone. He was playing his invisible cards as boldly as he dared.

"You're going to terrific lengths," Dujardin said, appearing greatly amused, "to make trouble for yourself out of nothing. Now that I've dispatched your ten men—"

"Or have you?"

"Now that I've dispatched them for you, virtually at the point of a gun, your moth-eaten conscience begins to hatch illusions. You're getting bats. You think your dead men will come to life. First you see them in news stories. Next you see them in butterflies. Next they'll be jumping at you right out of your soup—"

"Very funny, Dujardin," the governor snapped. "But I'm on the inside track, now. Whichever way the wind blows, you'll get your reward for your obedient and noble services."

"Meaning what?"

"When I find the first trace that any of those ten men are living, you're through. I'll give you the honor of being number eleven on my list. And you're daughter—well, I've got some ideas about her too."

In spite of the alert Heffles, the scientist straightened to his feet, clenched his fists, and shot a hard challenging eye at the governor.

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"A fine business! Conjuring up false guilt for innocent people," Dujardin said, and his whitened lips measured every word. "If I were the blackest criminal in the world, that wouldn't make Madeline guilty—"

"I'm far ahead of you, Dujardin," said the governor suavely. "Don't I know that *if* you've pulled some strange butterfly miracle over my ten men, you did it for a purpose? . . . You did it thinking there'd be a chance to bring them back. . . . Back to men! And you'd try it, too. The minute you thought you were through with me. Wouldn't you? . . . You or your daughter. Don't answer, you sphinx. But I'm not so dumb."

THE words were nerve-shattering, and their volume reechoed terrifyingly in my fish bowl.

"In a few days," said the governor, "Gaston, the comedian, will come back from a visit he's making to a hospital on the continent. He's gone to check up on what I think must be a false news story. He's promised to stop on the way back and let me know whether Raymond Quinton is alive. No, he doesn't know my purpose. He thinks I'm Quinton's friend. But when I get that report, I'll know what's what."

He paused, and all four Heffles as well as the scientist watched him thumb through the calendar.

"He'll soon be back," the governor went on. "Meanwhile I'll take a new interest in those other synthetic butterflies. Where are they?"

"Flying around wherever they please," said the scientist evasively.

"They huddle together out in the flower garden at night," said X. Heffle, turning to the window. "We could gather them up for you. Right out there—"

He opened the window and pointed.

Governor Revel nodded, observing that a once-over might be in order right away. "And this little mannish-looking freak with the red wings *we'll keep*—"

The scientist, backing out of the governor's way, struck the lid of my bowl with his elbow. The glass clattered over the edge of the table and crashed to the floor. I flew out the window.

And I hadn't needed any butterfly instincts to tell me it was time to fly. I knew, as well as I knew my name was Louis Ribot, that Dujardin had knocked that glass lid off on purpose.

WAR had been pounding across France in unprecedented blitzkriegs, during recent days, and its hatreds, fears, and tragedies had not failed to shake the island of Fraise.

But that the treacherous governor of this French island should dream of selling out to the enemy somehow had not occurred to me. And yet, for one of his rashness and lack of principle, it was what I should have expected.

What I heard, during the remainder of the show-down conversation between him and his scientist-stooge, convinced me that this was one of his alternative plans: to invite Nazi bombers to come over and clean up the mess he had started.

For at heart Governor Revel was scared white. The magic of science had him quivering in his boots. After seeing me, he knew that anything might happen. One or all of his ten victims might materialize before him—they might sprout from bulbs or hatch from eggs or jump out of water spouts—*unless he crushed out this whole realm of experimentation.*

He told Dujardin bluntly that a word to the German military staff would be the surest way to make a clean sweep of every damned haunt, butterfly, chrysalis, or test tube.

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"I'll give you one week to come out with the whole truth—or else." With that threat he departed, leaving the four Heffles alert at their posts.

The days moved slowly.

I kept out of sight to be sure the Heffles wouldn't recapture me.

I often visited Madeline's sunny south room, where the new French windows admitted lights of many hues. The other butterflies would be there, playing over the girl's lovely hair, chasing boldly down her arms, taking off from her fingertips. She called them each by name, but only one of them did I know—the blue and silver one named Maurice.

Maurice knew me, too, I assumed, for Madeline had begun to call me Raymond. But all of Maurice's pugnacious tendencies seemed to be glossed over with butterfly instincts. Like the others he was bright, cheery, playful—not malicious in the slightest. I couldn't help wondering whether he would have been the same if he had been as well developed as I, or whether he would have liked to finish our unfinished duel.

Then I observed something startling. Gradually he was changing—yes, and so were the others. Especially those who basked in the light of a certain amber-colored window. Though the changes were slight they were unmistakable. In the course of a week one butterfly that spent hours in the amber light acquired a heavier body, a rounder head, and the beginnings of tiny arms and legs—not the legs of the *lepidoptera,* but *human* arms and legs.

THEN I knew what the scientist had meant, instructing the architect to make mosaics of some specially prepared glass to be useful in laboratory experiments. Tadpoles and other forms of animal life which the scientist sometimes exposed to this amber window light developed with magical speed. It had the same effect as the amber lantern had had on me.

However, when Dujardin found any of us butterflies basking in the amber, he would call to Madeline to take us away. And so the changes in our butterfly bodies were suspended, and remained too slight for Madeline ever to notice.

I felt terrible, and if I hadn't been sturdy I would have had a nervous breakdown. For I knew what no one else except Dujardin knew—that we were figuratively living on dynamite with the fuse already lighted beneath us.

As I already stated, I was determined to put Mademoiselle Butterfly wise to the dangers. How? I didn't know. My butterfly talents were too ineffectual to make any impression. All my human knowledge was no good unless I could find some way to communicate it.

No little pet dog could have trailed any more persistently after its master than I trailed after her. I continually fluttered at her ears, crying at the top of my piping voice.

"It's me, Madeline. Can't you hear me? I've got something terribly important to tell you. Listen to me."

She would smile at me, and pet me, and call me a rogue for tickling her ears. But she couldn't seem to hear my voice.

"Madeline, you've got to know that I'm not what you think I am. I didn't come from a butterfly chrysalis. I'm a man—the actor you loved. Your father changed me. That green fluid—the pressures inside that false tunnel—"

I tried to spell words out, waving my hands. I tried to make use of the dot and dash code, sometimes with my arms, sometimes my wings. Occasionally I succeeded in making her intensely curious. Then other butterflies would swerve around her diverting her attention. Sometimes when she would be

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reading a book I would alight on the edge and start pointing to letters.

But she would brush me away, telling me I was full of funny tricks. To her there was no more purpose in my actions than in the endless random fluttering of the others.

And yet she must have sensed that there was a difference. Once while she was standing by the large window, radiating her friendliness and beauty to all of us, she turned to gaze at me.

I HAPPENED to be perched on the carved pedestal at the moment, *as if I were on a stage*. Perhaps it was her beauty, the loveliness of her honey-colored hair, the sunlight glinting from the myriad strings of beads at her throat, the costume effect of her yellow silk sleeves and full-skirted brown dress. There was all the glamor of footlights and music about her.

I began to act.

Unheard though my voice was, I went straight through a climax from a Moliere play, with the grandest gestures ever.

"Why, Raymond Quinton," she said, and there was a startled, haunted note in her voice, "you're a regular actor—just like your name's sake."

That was as near as I came to it—until I stumbled upon my bazaar method of writing.

Mademoiselle Butterfly was writing a letter that night. It was a love letter meant for me. I watched over her shoulder, and from time to time she spoke to me. But she did not *know*. I was only a cunning little pet, affording a little solace. She crumpled the letter, half-finished, and started another. But she went to sleep over her desk.

The ink bottle was open. I tried to dip the pen, but it was too heavy and awkward for me to handle. Then came the remarkable discovery. My little six-inch butterfly tongue coiled up under my nose could suck nectar. Why couldn't it suck ink? It could deposit pollen. Why couldn't it deposit ink?

Within a few minutes I had succeeded writing my first words with swift, delicate strokes. That was the beginning of this journal, written between the printed lines of this book.

"The invisible trap was closing in on me," I began, "on the night I finished my sell-out week at the Fraise Theater."

The more I wrote, the easier the tongue worked. The ink fairly flew, that night; for once I had begun my story, I wanted to complete it before showing it to Madeline.

There were two other evenings that Madeline fell asleep over letters, and each morning following she was mystified over the way the ink was disappearing, jokingly accusing me of drinking it.

Meanwhile, every hour brought Governor Revel's deadline closer.

THE end came swiftly.

For three of my fellow butterflies it was a violent end with no warning whatsoever. Evidently the governor had instructed the Heffles to kill all of us at once. They killed the first three they could get their hands on. By that time I was crying warnings to the others.

My butterfly habits might have been enough to convey a sense of danger to the others, but by this time I had made the remarkable discovery that my voice, unheard by persons, carried perfectly to my winged fellows. We became an army of six to fight our own battles. I had learned something about ink that would apply equally well to poison.

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We hid out until dusk, then raided the laboratory shelves. The strength of my arms was barely sufficient. I uncorked the bottle, each of us filled our little tubular tongues with poison. We slipped into the bedchambers of the Heffles and waited, biding our time until the snoring began.

Three snores were silenced that night.

Early the next morning W. Heffle, who had paced the grounds all night keeping vigil, beat his fists against a bedchamber window trying to rouse his brothers. We swooped down on him, a deadly little army of five butterflies. Five, not six, for one unfortunate member had succumbed to the poison.

I'll never forget the heroic attack that Maurice De Brosse made in his last fight. His flashy blue and silver wings caught the early morning light, made the butler start. Maurice cut in with all the daring of a champion swordsman. Twice Heffle's swinging palm grazed his wings. The third stroke landed squarely. Maurice fell to the sidewalk and W. Heffle stamped on him, cursing.

But the rest of us took our advantage when W. Heffle opened his mouth to curse. We flew at his face, sprayed poison on his tongue. Heffle, swinging at us, gulped and gagged—then sank into a heap . . .

These may be the last words I'll get to write. Nazi bombers have circled over.

Gaston has not returned.

Madeline, so far as I know, still hasn't learned her father's awful secret. Until a few minutes ago she was lying on the bed weeping. She thinks her father must have murdered the four Heffles. He denied it, of course, but his face has been white and stony, and he has loaded a pistol, knowing that the governor is sure to discover—

I've tried several times to write brief messages to Madeline, but so far I've had no luck—

The bombers are coming—

Madeline and Dujardin are carrying valuables down into the tunnel . . .

I RETURN to my journal, hoping to complete another brief entry.

The ruin was almost complete. The governor got more than he bargained for. Besides bombing of these laboratories the Nazis decided to turn the whole island into a grave-yard. They landed in boats, set fire to houses, demolished the governor's mansion, marched up the hillsides killing every living thing in their path.

Both Gaston and the governor arrived here just as the shambles began. Gaston helped Madeline and her father pack things into the tunnel—and he gave them the big news—that there were two Raymond Quintons—the real one, and *me, a double.*

The governor raved like a mad man, until little Gaston had to knock his teeth in to shut him up. The governor knew now that we, the butterflies, had killed his henchmen.

And Dujardin, for once, minced no words and dodged no issues. He had turned ten men into butterflies, and he was all set to add a few more specimens to his collection. Wherever the bombs dropped, they'd never reach the amber lantern or the synthetic butterfly hatchery, he said.

Most surprising to me was the way Madeline stood up under it all. The faith that she had in her father was something I'll never forget. She wasn't flinching from bombs, and she wasn't unnerved to hear the blunt truth about the game of murder-and-butterfly.

"Did you already know?" Her father turned the question on her sharply.

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"I've been reading all about it," she said, "in a journal written *by* a butterfly." She looked over her shoulder to see me fluttering through the tunnel entrance after her. She nodded with a quick smile. "Quinton—or whatever your name is, I *know* you now. *Stay with us—*"

Blasts drowned her voice. The bombs were going to catch us on this round. And they did.

Then there was a lull, and I found my way out into the open. The ground forces were coming up fast. I saw Gaston ride across the narrows to the Portugal side. Dujardin had invited him to share the tunnel, but Gaston had refused, having seen too much of the Nazi tactics back on the continent. He was sure the tunnel would be as thoroughly blitzkrieged as the rest of the island.

I SAW Governor Revel try to follow Gaston for a steel cable escape. The governor's terror was pitiful to see. He had brought this death on himself, but he still thought he could escape it. When he found the pulley gone, he ran back to the laboratory, tried to break into the tunnel entrance. It stood solid against his blows. Fire was crackling from the front of the mansion. Light tanks were crushing the zig-zagging chain of laboratories.

The governor raced back to the steel cable. I flew along to a sheltered spot on the bank to watch him. He tried to cross, hand over hand. It was slow going. Well out over the water he struggled to hang on. Then a plane zoomed down spraying machine-gun bullets and riddled him. He dropped to the water, a mass of shreds. . . .

All has been quiet for many days.

Eventually there will be more activity, for the armed force that spared no life—except for a few insects—will soon come in greater numbers. They will turn what was once a laboratory for life into a fortress of death.

There was so little left of the white-brick mansion that I had to search many hours before finding the ink and the book that make up this journal.

But where life has been wiped out, there life will begin again.

Today two new creatures emerged from a slab of porous pink colored rock that always reminds me of a huge piece of taffy candy.

They were damp, helpless creatures until their wings had had time to stiffen. But their little bodies, like my own, were human in form.

The larger of the two was a little man with a round though slightly wrinkled face, sharp eyes that were courageous, however tiny. He flew at once to inspect the ruins of the building, and when he came back there was an interesting glint of good cheer in his funny little face. The amber windows that we would need someday, he told us in his piping voice, were still standing.

Then the wings of the other little creature began to spread proudly. She was a lovely yellow butterfly, but her round little face was framed in the luxurious spun-gold hair, and her body was a perfect little female figure, as graceful as her glorious yellow wings.

"Now we're even," she said to me in a funny little voice. "Really, it won't be so bad, being butterflies for awhile. And father thinks—and I do too—that sometime, after the danger is over—"

I'm not just certain just what she was going to say, for at that moment the four other synthetic butterflies came out of hiding to join the reunion.

Which reminds me, the thing I dislike most about being a human butterfly is the lack of privacy. These butterfly instincts— I must hide. Some people are coming to look over these ruins.

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THE MAGIC

Perry Thorpe sat up in bed, staring in amazement at the hovering flute

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FLUTE

by
DAVID V. REED

Perry Thorpe was in a rage when the flute's sour notes ruined his concert; he blamed the flute, but that was a mistake—as he found out to his terror!

"WE'VE been through a lot together, but this is the end. The truth is—you're no good." Perry Thorpe looked at the flute that lay in its case beside him, where he had tumbled into bed. He ran his fingers tenderly over the silver flute. "You made a monkey out of me tonight," he said aloud. "Disgraced me at a party and made me get drunk."

Frowning, and staggering more than walking, Thorpe carried the flute to his desk. "Hear me?" he said. "I used to think of you as something almost human, something with a soul. And what did I get? Took you to a party where there must have been a dozen beautiful girls, and you sounded like a foghorn. That damned saxophone player had everybody listening to him. Here I've been practicing for years, watching out for you in bad weather, and you let that saxophone player make me look like a jackass."

Perry Thorpe undressed carelessly, still mumbling to the flute, and got into bed in the dark room. "I was a bore—that's what I was! There isn't a good tune in you! You're a flop!"

And then Thorpe groaned once or twice, because his head was stuffed with cotton, and his mouth felt like a brewery. No matter how much beer he'd drunk, he hadn't been able to forget what had happened at the party. In his mind's eye, Perry Thorpe saw the fat little saxophone player, his cheeks puffing as he blew—and everybody rocking to his hoarse melodies. Gradually the scene faded, and probably Perry Thorpe fell asleep not long afterward. . . .

When he found himself awake again, it was with a start. He was sitting up in bed, his hands holding his temples, and his mind flooded with music. He could still hear those miraculous notes; the magnificent melody that had spun itself into being while he slept. He could almost hear it still, wave after wave of the purest music, running on and on, gathering beauty and substance as it went, until it rose in his memory as the loveliest solo for the flute he had ever heard.

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For it *had* been a flute. There was no mistake about that. The flute he remembered — almost remembered, hearing, had been played by a master, though he could think of no one he had ever heard who had played with such depth and such ease. And the melody? The brain-child of a drunken musician, too far gone even to get out of bed and try to put some of the notes down. He felt he was going to cry.

All this happened in an instant, and the instant after that, someone was thumping on the wall from the next room, and a high-pitched feminine voice called, "Cut it out, you wild man!"

"Huh?" said Perry Thorpe, quietly. He felt quite numb, and after puzzling a moment, fell back again to sleep.

BUT sleep was impossible. He had no idea how long he had dozed this time before he opened his eyes again in the darkness, but the silvery flute had returned, and the evanescent music seemed still to be hanging in the air. And this time, in addition to the thumping on the wall, there was someone at the door.

"Ah, shut up!" he called, gathering himself out of bed and going to the door. "What do you want?" he mumbled sleepily to the man who stood there in a dressing gown.

"Listen, Thorpe," said the man. "Do I have to remind you I'm a member of the police force before you quiet down? Ain't it enough you play that damn thing night and day without you starting to blow your brains out on a Saturday night at 3 A.M.?"

Perry Thorpe stood there, rocking on his feet, looking at the huge man. "Who, me?" he groaned. The music was still in his mind.

"Don't mean your uncle. Now cut out that piccolo playing or I'll run you in the can. You must be drunk." The man advanced a step and took a deep breath. "You *are* drunk," he announced, almost officially. "Now go back to—"

"It isn't a piccolo," said Thorpe. "It's a flute. It's—"

"I don't care if it's a trained seal. Stop that confounded noise or—"

"Noise?" said Thorpe, a trifle less sleepy. "You call that wonderful music. . . ." Suddenly, Thorpe was wide awake. "Did *you* hear it too?" he cried.

"Look at the man, will you?" the policeman said to an imaginary witness. "Listen, Thorpe, not only did *I* hear it, but I expect letters from my relatives in Brooklyn about it. What the hell do you think got me up at this ungodly hour?"

"Wasn't it the most wonderful thing you've ever heard?" cried Thorpe. "Wasn't it almost as if something from another world had come down to play for us?"

"I wasn't in the mood to appreciate it," came the dour answer. "I had a tough day at the station house. Now stop it."

"But *I* wasn't playing."

The man in the dressing gown took a deep breath and backed away. "All right," he said. "All right. I warned you." And he turned and disappeared down the stairs.

Thorpe returned to bed, where he lay awake. If only he had been playing that flute. . . . What flute? The flute he had heard in his sleep? How could Officer Flaherty have heard a flute in Perry Thorpe's mind? And not only Flaherty, but that girl next door with the off-key voice?

Plainly, the whole business was fantastic. Perry Thorpe was not drunk enough to stop him from realizing that he *was* drunk, nevertheless, and on this he at once blamed everything.

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But there was a sneaking little thought coming back to him, a horrible doubting thought, and as it lingered, he found sleep still impossible. There was only one thing to do. He lay back in bed, quietly. Then, after a while, he began breathing deeply and regularly, as if he were indeed asleep . . .

THEN it came. *La-la-la-la-li!* A tender, high-pitched run on a flute! He was out of bed like a tiger, bounding noiselessly in one great, careless leap that carried him right to the silver flute on the desk. But with his first movement, the flute had gone silent!

What flute? *His* flute? But-but. . . . No, it was lying there, inanimate, silent, the flute he had always known.

Holding his head between his hands, Thorpe went back to bed. He was no sooner under the covers than the flute —there was no doubt about *which* flute —let go with a *dolce la-li-li-la* and then abruptly swung into a wild, melodious song not unlike that of an inspired shepherd.

"Oh-h-h, my Lord!" Thorpe yelled, jumping up and standing in bed, his eyes wide and his mouth wider. "Help!" he yelled again.

And the flute kept playing, growing louder, then softer, playing breathless snatches of music of a romantic nature. It kept playing right through the pounding on the wall, which commenced immediately; through the hammering on the floor, which was Officer Flaherty from the apartment below; through the thudding on the ceiling, which was a vague somebody upstairs.

How that flute could play! Stones would have melted. The river should have stopped in its course. Humans should have been transfixed. And Perry Thorpe was transfixed—more than that —he was paralyzed. He stood in bed, an astonished, frightened young man . . . and yet somehow enthralled, spellbound.

But he was the only one. On four sides the hammering was like thunder. The walls, the floor, the ceiling shook. The room was a great drum that a dozen different people were pounding.

As if the flute could sense the conflicting feelings that came together in that room, it changed its tune suddenly and from its silvery depths a fierce, anguished melody poured, a song whose low notes pierced Perry Thorpe's brain and whose high notes rattled the window panes.

Louder and louder the hammering grew, and wilder the flute played, in harmony with everyone—with the pounding of heavy feet on the stairs as they came closer, matching blow for blow of the man at the door, mingling with the angry cries that came on all sides.

Louder and higher than all of them, Thorpe's voice roared out: "Stop it! Stop it!" There were tears in his eyes. He had never heard such—but the people—Flaherty—the police! "STOP!"

But the flute didn't stop. The door was groaning with a weight pressing against it; in a moment it would be forced. Dragging himself, hardly able to move, his eyes never leaving the flute as it lay on the desk, outlined by the light that came from the moon outside, Thorpe went to the door. Wilder and wilder the flute played, until all the world had become something for the magic of its music to play with.

In that unequalled moment, Thorpe opened the door—and the flute stopped an instant before the door opened!

"Thorpe!" Flaherty shouted. "I'll —" and he stopped.

THERE were half a dozen angry people in various forms of undress standing in the hall, and Perry Thorpe

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stood before them, his shoulders moving, his face glistening in the hall-light, crying unashamedly.

"What's the matter?" said Flaherty, at once bewildered and softened. "Speak up, lad, what's wrong?"

A full half-minute passed before Thorpe could say a word. Presently he sobbed, "The flute . . . it's playing by itself."

Several soft gasps sounded, and a gathered murmur swept down the hall. "What did you say?" said Flaherty.

But Thorpe couldn't speak again. The tears were falling noiselessly down his face, and he motioned them to come in with him. Silently, the people in the hall entered the room, followed Thorpe in the darkness to the flute as it lay in its little pool of moonlight on the desk.

"It . . . played by itself," Thorpe managed to say. "Didn't you notice how it stopped just when I opened the door? How could I have been playing it? I wouldn't have had time to get it back to the desk."

A thin, hawk-faced woman in a pea-green robe brought a hand up to her mouth and stifled a cry. "That's so," said a man, slowly. "What he says is true."

As if their gaze was compelled, every eye slowly gravitated to the flute now. It was a delicate, silver instrument. It seemed sleek, almost debonair, its lines exquisitely fashioned, a retiring yet charming thing. In the silence, Officer Flaherty reached out a hand, gingerly, and brought the flute to his mouth. He blew—and a horrible, rasping sound came out.

Flaherty almost dropped the flute, and the compelling instant, the wraith-like quality of that suspended moment, burst. With the surprising simultaneity that accompanied all their actions, a new reaction took place. The world of the commonplace returned.

"What are you crying about?" Flaherty demanded.

"The music," said Thorpe, beginning to cry again. "I can't stand it. It's too beautiful."

Only Flaherty's hands moved; they twiched and shook. His voice came unsteadily, as if with great effort. "Listen," he said, "I ain't been a cop for fifteen years for nothing. I don't know what you got rigged up here, or how you managed that trick. All I got to say is if I hear another peep out of that piccolo, I'll—I'll—you crack-brained . . ." And here Flaherty's face blew up so full that further speech was impossible. He turned abruptly and forged through the others, who followed him without a word.

Alone with the flute, Perry Thorpe sat down near the desk, scarcely breathing. He couldn't take his eyes off the flute. He was waiting. . . .

The sounds of doors slamming echoed through the house. The voices died away and silence and rest came again to the outraged house.

Then, quietly: *li-li-li.*

"Don't!" said Perry Thorpe, trembling.

Li-li-la! came from the flute, still quietly, as if in dialogue. And without waiting: *li-la-li-li-li-i-i* . . . until it died away mournfully. It was playing with him!

"If you don't stop—" Thorpe began. To no avail. Suddenly the flute sang out sweetly, loudly, in a run of notes like a torrent.

THERE was no stopping it. Like something utterly wicked and unbelievable the flute was rousing the house again! Without a moment's hesitation, Thorpe opened the window and flung the flute down into the backyard two flights below, watching it gleam in

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the light as it fell—and still playing!

Still playing! *Still playing!* Now a great martial air filled the night, wailing and crying with blood lust, singing as if it was the gathered voice of the dead. Just before the windows of the neighborhood began opening, Thorpe could hear the echoes of the flute rebounding from the walls of a hundred houses, running down the street in a piercing series of notes. And then the furious, uncomprehending shouts of the neighbors rose higher and higher, yet never above the flute, until complete bedlam had come.

Now again, Perry Thorpe turned aghast, watching the walls shake as his neighbors pounded away on the door.

"Stop it! Stop it! You crazy loon—"

"Open that door before—"

"You drunken—"

"Stop that flute!"

Perry Thorpe's eyes were popping as he leaned far out of the window, looking down into the courtyard below. His whole body trembled, and the perspiration ran down his face in sheer rivers. "Oh, Lord, oh . . ." he kept whispering. . . .

For the flute, playing by itself down in the courtyard, *Sounded as if it were still in Thorpe's room!*

Yet . . . the music was more magnificent than it had been all that melancholy, insane night, and Thorpe, screaming at odd moments to the flute below to stop, would now and again sit quietly and listen to the flute, trying to remember phrases, even humming along with it. And so intoxicated with the strange music of the silver flute did he become that it stopped mattering to him that the whole neighborhood had awakened and were screaming for the flute, and Thorpe—or so they supposed—to stop.

When the door was finally broken down, and the room overflowed with furious tenants and half a dozen policemen, among whom was Flaherty, Thorpe was beyond them. The music had finally taken him prisoner, and he sat calmly by the window, nodding his head and humming . . .

BUT beneath his tranquillity there was a little blaze of alarm. Part of it was due perhaps to the sounds of sirens that he had heard in the street, sounds that meant patrol wagons were coming; that hadn't meant much, because the flute was safely in the yard, where its music could not be attributed to him. But as the door had crashed open and the police spilled in, the flute suddenly stopped! For a moment, Thorpe chilled, then he was calm again.

An officer with a sergeant's stripes strode over to Thorpe, while the other policemen kept back the curious. "Hey," he said loudly, "what's the matter with you? Gone nuts?"

"I'm not sure," said Thorpe, idly. "Now what would you say if I told you my flute was playing by itself—that I'd thrown it out the window half an hour ago?"

The sergeant turned to two of his men. "All right, boys, into the wagon with him."

Perry Thorpe rose before the police got to him, anxiety and anger rising with him. "Listen, Sergeant," he exclaimed, "why don't you investigate? I don't care how nutty it sounds: I say that flute is in the courtyard and it plays by itself."

"Sure, sure," said the sergeant. "I ain't takin' you in for playin' that one. It's the little one that I'm interested in." And from the desk right beside Perry Thorpe he lifted a flute—the silver flute that Thorpe knew so well!

For an instant, as Thorpe looked at the flute he had thrown out the window,

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the world spun slowly beneah his gaze; the walls that had taken the pounding on all sides seemed suddenly tired and were melting, like huge blobs of taffy; and even the police were huge blue shadows. And through that world where nothing was anything, Thorpe saw the little silver flute, trim and silent, lying before him in the sergeant's hands.

Then Thorpe burst out with a cry. "I threw it out! I didn't play it! I haven't played it all night! It's been—"

"Watch him, boys," said the sergeant, turning away. "Maybe he's just a little stinko on beer, like Flaherty says, and maybe he's off. I heard about cases like this before. Somethin' about these musicians. . . ."

Thorpe was struggling with the police then, yelling incoherently, though through his yelling he could still hear the lovely music of the flute, and the next minute he was humming the last melody, humming at the top of his voice.

"Take that damn piccolo along," Flaherty shouted. "It's evidence."

"It isn't a piccolo!" Thorpe shouted as the police, forming a cordon around him, were wrapping him in his overcoat, pulling on his trousers and shoes. "It's a flute! *La-la-li-li!*" His voice grew louder as he hummed.

"Got the flute?" the sergeant shouted. "All right—one side, everybody—let's go!" Pushing through the mass of people in the hall, half-carrying Thorpe, the police rushed down the stairs and out into the street, where it seemed half the city had gathered to watch Perry Thorpe marched into the wagon. A spontaneous yell greeted him, amid angry shouts of condemnation. For a moment Perry Thorpe knew the thrill of brief notoriety, and then he was crying again, protesting his innocence, shouting that he hadn't played the flute, and again the tears were coursing down his face as the police marched him straight to the wagon.

BUT his protestations brought a new note into the mob's voice. Hearing the hysterical denials made them pause a moment, either in their anger or amusement, and take this new element under consideration. What the outcome might have been is problematical, because half a dozen policemen are a fine half-dozen anywhere, yet a mob this size, fully aroused—well, it never came to that.

For, as Perry Thorpe climbed the first step up the wagon behind the policeman with the flute, he stumbled, and in stumbling his head came down to where his mouth might conceivably have touched the mouthpiece of the flute. It didn't, as it happens, touch the flute at all—it merely looked that way—but instantaneously the flute went off in a brilliant run of *li-li-la-la* that pierced the ears.

The policeman snatched at the flute and the music stopped, and the crowd let out a roar of laughter. "What a sense of humor!" a fat man shouted, and the crowd echoed him.

Thorpe dived for the doorway to the wagon. "But I didn't play it!" he yelled. The laughter almost swept him off his feet with the wind it raised. Even the police were laughing.

"Bravo!" a voice shouted.

"A genius!" said another.

"He's nuts!" said a third.

"But a genius!" the second shouted again.

And so, with Perry Thorpe crying in bewilderment, and the mob waving and shouting goodbyes, the sirens of the cavalcade started up, the motors coughed, and through a thoroughly awakened area of the city, the party started for precinct headquarters, rac-

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ing through the darkened streets just as the dawn hinted its arrival . . .

THE ceremonies at the desk were short. The officer there made a brief entry in his ledger. The story of the flute hardly intrigued him. He scratched himself on his neck and mumbled, "So you got a piccolo that plays by itself, huh?" His eyes wandered back to the deck of cards arranged on the desk before him, forming a half-finished game of solitaire. Then he looked up with a start. "That's a new one on me," he sighed. "All right, boys, throw him in the can until the fuzz wears off his tongue."

"But my flute—" Thorpe began.

The officer put down a three of spades. "I'll put it in me own desk under your very eyes," he said, wearily. He turned to the Sergeant. "I been trying to win a game since ten o'clock," he said, a wave of emotion surging under his words. "Get that guy away from here."

Three policemen accompanied Perry Thorpe to a dank little cell at the end of a row. One of them, a fat, short man, bent over and whispered, "Listen, buddy, you mind telling me where you bought that beer?"

Thorpe shook his head. "Forgot," he muttered.

The policeman nodded, as if he had been expecting the answer. "Ain't it always the same?" he groaned. "The guys that need it never know where to find it."

Thorpe sat down solidly on the hard bed that hung by two chains from the wall. His head was buzzing again as he tried to review what had happened to him. The flute—he had had it for three years. He had bought it from a department store, paid cash. At least if he had gotten it in a queer little pawnshop, from a bent little man, whose shop had subsequently vanished—all right. He might have expected what had happened. But why . . . why should . . .

What was that?

A great shudder swept Perry Thorpe. He had imagined hearing the flute again, here in the safety of his cell. Thankfully, he remembered that the officer at the desk had locked it up.

La-la-la, it began, then played a sweet ending run. Thorpe was standing on the bed. "Hey!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "It's playing again. Hear it? It's playing again and you've got it in your desk!"

INSTANTLY there was a chorus of shouts from the adjoining cells as the whole two rows angrily came to life. A face in the cell next to Thorpe's came dangerously close to him and the lips on it said, "Stop that fire-engine before I push your gizzard down your throat."

"Who me?" Thorpe cried. "It's the flute in the desk!"

But suddenly it hit him that as he spoke—the music would stop—and it wouldn't begin again until he stopped speaking! That was what was happening now!

But then—what was that lying at his feet? That long, silver tube. Perry Thorpe knew what it was. The flute.

Down the far end of the cell block the gates were swinging open. The music of the flute was playing a melody Thorpe scarcely remembered.

Oh-h-h, I wish I had some-one to love me . . . The Prisoner's Song!

"Pipe down!" the desk officer was shouting.

"Let me at him, Sarge!" someone yelled. "I'll pipe him down!"

The desk Sergeant turned up all the lights amid a new roar of protests, and came puffing down the block, two officers behind him. "Damn you!" he bellowed, "don't you know when to stop

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rehearsing? Give me that other piccolo!"

Thorpe was sitting with his feet curled under him, like a Turk. Quietly, he lifted a sad face to the officer. "It's a flute," he observed. "And it isn't here any more."

"Throw him out!" a voice howled. "Keep them drunks out of here! This place is for criminals!"

The desk Sergeant turned, momentarily shaken from his purpose. "I suppose you'll be moving in the morning?" he shouted. Then he was back, glaring at Thorpe. "What'd *you* say?" he said. "Oh, yes!" He remembered. "So it's a flute, is it? Well, give it here before I make you eat it."

"Eat it!" the same voice as before howled. "It's the only square meal you'll ever get in this place!"

"Sh-a-a-a-ad-d-a-a-ppppp!" the Sergeant roared, his neck swelling until the cords stood out. "What the hell do you think this?"

"Amateur night," said a small voice nearby.

The Sergeant stumbled forward and gripped the cell bars. "Pete," he said, hoarsely, "get this guy and that piccolo out of here and in the office before I lose my mind."

Standing before the desk some moments later, Thorpe said, "These officers examined my cell after I left and they'll tell you there's no flute hidden there. Now maybe someone will listen to me."

The desk officer had his head buried in his arms. He slowly peeped out from underneath. "Search him, Pete," he muttered.

"I have, sir," said the taller of the two policemen. "He's got nothing except a breath like the morning dew."

The Sergeant sat up. He opened his desk drawer and pulled out the flute, laying it gingerly on the desk.

Perry Thorpe opened his mouth to speak—and his mouth froze that way—because the instant his lips parted the flute went off! *Li-li-li-la-a-a!* It seemed to be coming from his mouth!

"OHHHH!" the Sergeant cried out as if he had been stabbed. *"He can whistle like a piccolo!"*

Thorpe snapped his lips shut with an effort that brought perspiration to his forehead. "The flute . . ." he gulped. "I swear—"

THE officer named Pete put a hand down over Perry Thorpe's mouth, and an instant afterward a full burst of high notes seemed to pour past the officer's hand, filling the room with shrieking music, but undoubtedly flute music. The howls from the cell block floated in. The officer quickly took his hand away from Thorpe's mouth.

"Listen to me," Thorpe burst out. "I can't make a sound like a flute! Nobody can! It just looks that way because it happens that every time I stop speaking, the flute takes the opportunity to sound off and make it appear as if I'm making the music, and that's what happened before and that's what's happening now, and that's what's going to keep happening, but I don't know why and I'm telling you that there's no way out of it—"

"Shut up a minute!" the Sergeant bellowed.

"—unless you believe me and watch—if I stop talking the music'll begin again," Thorpe said, rattling away, "and I don't want that to happen so I'm going to keep talking that flute out of playing if I have to talk all night, and I don't mind talking all night because I'd rather talk all night than have that flute play and have people think I'm either playing it or imitating it, and instead of that I'm going—"

The Sergeant had climbed up on his

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chair, and he was standing there now, holding his head in his hands. "Sh-a-a-ad-d-a-a-ppp!" he yelled. "Stop that confounded talking! I can't hear meself think!"

"—to keep right on with any old kind of—" Thorpe was saying, "oh-no, not unless you take the full responsibility if that flute plays again, and on the other hand I'm perfectly contented to just keep on talking, keep on talking, any old words that—"

The Sergeant jumped up atop the desk. "Stop!" he almost screamed. "I'll take the full responsibility!"

Abruptly, Perry Thorpe stopped speaking.

And there was silence, wonderful silence. The three policemen and Perry Thorpe stood there looking at each other, drinking the quiet in. The Sergeant got down off the desk to the chair, then down on the floor.

The Sergeant sighed. "All right," he said, brokenly. "You got me to do what you wanted. I took the responsibility for you imitating that piccolo."

"But I didn't imitate anything," said Thorpe.

The Sergeant looked at him in the quiet. "Just like you didn't play it when you had it in your room?"

"Right. The flute was in my cell when you came."

"Oh," said the Sergeant. "Then I was mistaken when I thought I took it out of me desk a couple of minutes ago?"

"No. It got back there somehow. Just like it got to my room after I threw it down into the alley."

"Ummmmm," said the Sergeant. "So you don't admit anything?" Perry Thorne shook his head. "So you call this blessed silence we're having now nothing more than a mere accident, or, you might say, a whim of that confounded piccolo?" Thorpe nodded and was about to speak, but the Sergeant said, "All right, I know—it's a flute. Now stand back and let me gather me brains together."

THE Sergeant let his eyes linger over the cards on his desk. There were footprints over them from where he had been standing on them. He looked again at Thorpe. "So you think maybe that piccolo is going to go off again soon?" he asked, quietly.

"I can't say. It might." Thorpe couldn't take his eyes off the flute.

"Well," said the Sergeant. He leaned forward heavily until his face hung over the opposite side of his desk and he looked directly at Thorpe. "Pete, give me that ring of keys. Now then, you," he addressed Perry Thorpe, "d'you see this ring of keys? There's one for each cell in there, and in each one of those cells there is a man whose one aim in life now is to get a pair of hands around your windpipe, which is doing a jig in the Adam's apple this minute."

The Sergeant fell back and picked up the flute. He held it out at arm's length. "Here, take it back to your cell with you. I don't want to argue about imitations when they hold the inquest."

"What inquest?" said Perry Thorpe.

"Yours," said the Sergeant, amicably. "You're going back into that cell of yours, with that piccolo. Then—the first sound I hear, I am going to throw this ring of keys into the nearest cell."

"But they'll open their cells . . ." Thorpe faltered.

"Right."

". . . and they'll come after me. . . ."

"Ummm-hmmmm."

". . . they'll kill me!"

"Exactly!" said the Sergeant. "That's what I mean by mentioning an inquest. So the idea is to keep the piccolo quiet, and to keep yourself from

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doing imitations." His face grew dark. "Because in spite of what you hear, we are *not* running an amateur night here!"

Perry Thorpe almost fainted. He held up his hands in a plea. "You don't know what you're doing," he moaned. "You're sending an innocent man to his doom. I have absolutely no control over this flute, no matter whether I have it with me or not. Please, Sergeant, listen to me. . . ."

"Not so good," said the Sergeant, dryly. "Outside of being able to perspire when you want to, you're a ham. My last bit of advice for you is to stick to imitations. Take him away, boys."

One of the officers thrust the flute into Thorpe's clammy hands, and the other began to push him forward. A low, anticipatory murmur, the combination of a dozen snarls, greeted Perry Thorpe as he was ushered back to his cell at the end of the block.

The officer named Pete bent to Thorpe and whispered, "Don't they sound like mad wolves?" Thorpe didn't answer. He couldn't answer. From the waist up, he was like a man already dead. His eyes were glassy, his arms rigid, one hand stiffly holding the flute, and even his breathing became imperceptible. Only his legs were alive—and his ears. He was straining his hearing, waiting for the flute to make the first sound that would mean. . . .

THE cell door clanged shut behind him. Slowly he sat down on the edge of the bed, holding the flute in both hands and looking at it as if it was a stick of dynamite. The sweat ran down his face in swollen streams. From the fingertips which held the flute, little shocks of electricity moved up, overheating the rest of his body.

Then, ever so faintly, the first sound came, a *li-li-li* like the distant tinkling of fairy bells. Thorpe groaned quietly. "Please," he begged, "please be quiet." But the sound came again, not loud enough to be heard five feet away, but louder than the first time.

"Hey!" a voice nearby shouted. "He's talking to himself! He's loco!"

Answering shouts came from all sides, but Thorpe didn't hear them. He peered down the end of the cell corridor and saw the Sergeant standing on the other side of the bars, and the ring of keys in his hand was swinging. But even the ominous sound of the keys was lost on Perry Thorpe. For the flute was at it again, and it was getting louder, almost loud enough now to pass out of his cell.

Thorpe was clutching the flute now, his eyes closed. "Please," he whispered, "did I make you angry before? Is that it? Was it the nasty things I said to you earlier tonight? I didn't mean them. I didn't mean a single syllable of it!"

Was he imagining it, or was the flute growing softer?

"You're the most wonderful flute in the world! You're the only flute I've ever had. You mean more to me than anything else. I wouldn't hurt you for the world. I ought to cut my tongue out for the things I said—"

There was a sharp, clicking sound then, as if something had snapped, and the sound startled Perry Thorpe into opening his eyes. Then he saw the Sergeant standing right outside his cell, flanked by the other two officers.

"Holy smoke!" said the Sergeant, huskily. "What a drunk! What a drunk!" He was holding his head in his hands and he was rocking. The fat little policeman sighed heavily. Pete, the tall one, was just staring. Then they turned around and left, their feet shuffling down the corridor.

Thorpe heard them go. The flute

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was completely silent now. Thorpe laid it down beside him and closed his eyes again . . .

WHEN morning came and the first rays of the sun ran across the cell floor and hit Perry Thorpe in the eyes, he started up like a shot. Instinctively he grabbed the flute that was lying beside him still. "Sh-h-h," he whispered. "Be quiet!"

Then he looked around and saw the cell and he remembered, or thought he did, the roll-call of fantastic events of the night before. Perry Thorpe groaned a mighty groan. His still sleepy eyes couldn't believe what he saw, and the dull ache in his skull was no help.

"Rise and shine, lad. Rise and shine!" There was a smiling policeman outside the cell door, working the lock. "The new desk Sergeant is achin' to meet you."

When Thorpe stood before the new Sergeant, that officer, a dry-faced man whose face cracked when he smiled, said: "Sergeant Muldoon left at eight o'clock, young man, an' he told me a story that's past believin'. How do you feel this mornin'?"

Perry Thorpe swayed a little, mumbled, "Lousy." He was staring at the flute and grinning. As he remembered more and more what had happened the previous night, he grinned the more.

"You were powerful drunk last night," said the Sergeant.

"*Was I?*" Thorpe agreed. "Man, I could swear it had all happened—That it might happen again in a minute."

The Sergeant smiled slowly. "I know how 'tis," he said. "Many's the morn I've opened me eyes to see the same green animals as I had taken home the night before. You've a powerful imagination, lad, an' one which I'd say needed no drinking to stimulate it. If you'll take my advice—"

Thorpe straightened up. "Thanks. I've had a terrible lesson," he said. "Sure, I know now I imagined the whole thing."

"O' course you did!" The Sergeant came off the bench, taking Thorpe's arm. "Here, now, stop that shiverin'. That's better." He made an entry in the large ledger that lay opened on the desk. "I've checked you out of the police hotel, now, an' you'll be a better man for the experience. Now you go home and get some rest."

Perry Thorpe shook hands with the officer and started out of the building.

As he walked slowly down the corridor, he tried to arrange his thoughts. He had never been so drunk before, he knew that. But the intensity of those imagined events. And the way the flute had actually stopped its playing—what the hell was he thinking about? The flute playing *itself?* Nonsense! Sheer, stupid nonsense—the kind one could expect from a drunk.

But then—the flute—if it *had* played by itself—had started after he had insulted it, and it had stopped after . . . after what? After he had begged it to stop and had said he was sorry.

In its own insane pattern, that made sense of a sort. But the answer was clearly that it had all been in his mind. The explanations of the police, and the racking pain in his head, were enough testimony to that.

But just then, as he walked ahead toward the exit—*la-la-la-li-li-li!*

PERRY THORPE jumped a foot off the floor, holding the flute as far away as he could. His ears were alive with the pain of hearing the sound of the flute—and it had sounded as if it came from an open door that he had just passed. It was—

"Hey—you!"

Thorpe spun around. There was a

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burly policeman standing in his shirt-sleeves, standing in the doorway he had just passed. In his hands he held a flute. "Hey!" he said, coming toward Thorpe, "you the guy that was in the can all night?"

"Yes," said Thorpe, his voice quavering. "Did you just play a run on that flute?"

"Sure." The policeman looked at Thorpe a moment, then began to laugh. "My oh my," he roared. "Did you think it was *your* flute playing again—the way you kept telling old Muldoon last night?"

Perry Thorpe stood undecided, then joined in the laughter. "Boy, was I drunk!" he grinned. The whole thing was clearer now. This was the world of sanity again; when a flute played, someone was playing it.

"Let me have a look at that flute," said the officer, taking it out of Thorpe's hands. "I play on the police band here," he said. "We're going to have a rehearsal in about ten minutes. Parade today."

He turned the flute admiringly. "Good-looking, isn't it?" he offered. "Mind if I blow a note or two on it?"

Thorpe nodded and the policeman put the flute to his lips. He blew, and a sound like wind blowing through a broken bottle came out. "Holly Hannah!" said the policeman in alarm. "The reed's busted clean through!"

"Huh?" said Thorpe, looking at the flute. Suddenly he remembered hearing a sharp click the night before—a click which might have been the reed as it split, and which would—

"Can't play now," said the policeman. "Why, the reed's the heart of a good flute. The dampness in the cell must have broken it. When you've broken that, you've broken the heart of the instrument."

"Oh my God," Perry Thorpe muttered. He felt faint and a fear grew in him. He had broken the heart of the flute. When had that click come? When he had said: "you're the most wonderful flute in . . . I wouldn't hurt you for . . . I ought to cut my tongue out. . . ." All the things he had said in that last perilous moment when the flute had begun to get louder again in his cell, when the Sergeant was waiting to throw the keys . . .

Broken the heart of the flute. In its insane way, that too made sense! Was that why the flute hadn't played afterwards? Was the answer to the seeming delirium that had taken him? The cell damp—yes. But what he had said. . . ?

"Anything wrong?" said the policeman. "You look sick."

"No," said Thorpe, taking the flute. "I'm all right. Just a hangover. Had a little too much last night." He began walking toward the door again.

He had had too much the night before. He knew that. But the rest . . . If the cell damp had broken the reed, if anything else had really been the drink . . .

Perry Thorpe came out into the sunshine. He would never really know the answer. This was a rational world. This was a world that made sense. But one thing more Perry Thorpe knew. He would never say another unkind word to that flute as long as he lived. Not that he really believed the nonsense of the broken heart, or the playing on its own . . . not at all.

"But," he said aloud, to himself, "just in case."

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Earning His Salt!

by John E. Harry

Here is an answer to Jep Powell's recent article "Chilly, But Cheering" which created so much fuss.

IN the February issue of your magazine appears an article entitled "Chilly, But Cheering," by Jep Powell, telling how men may finally be replaced on earth by a salt solution. I feel it my duty to myself and my fellow males to register a loud and vigorous protest to Mr. Powell's deductions.

Mr. Powell's whole metaphysical structure has been reared on a shaky foundation and just to keep the gals from getting *too* crazy about salt, I feel it's up to me to swing the club that knocks out that foundation.

Mr. Powell starts with an assumption that is natural, but erroneous—that is, that the function of the male animal is simply stimulating the female into starting up her assembly line. The male animal was developed because his function was a necessary one—and it's more than setting the factory wheels to humming. That of providing every child (or other animal offspring) with *two* parents; to mix and dilute bloodlines. Nature abhors inbreeding even more than she abhors a vacuum.

It's true that animal breeders use inbreeding, properly controlled, to permanently establish desirable bloodlines. The secret lies in those two words, "properly controlled." And if the girls ever did decide to resort to the salt shaker instead of us men, they'd find out in a hurry that what they proposed was inbreeding run wild—and how!

The closest inbreeding that is possible (pardon me—that *was* possible before this salt business) is that of brother-sister matings over a long number of generations. It's been tried; not on humans, of course—fruit flies and mice were the fall guys. The inevitable result has always been the lowering of sexual vitality until after seven or eight generations no more young were brought into the world. If the gals decided to do away with us boys in favor of deep-sea immersion, they might be clamoring to get us back in a couple of hundred years, when their numbers began becoming dangerously low.

Inbreeding has been practiced by humans; and those who've read history know the results when that practice is pushed to excess. Madness, disease, sudden death—they all stalk through the ranks of royalty as if they were welcome friends. The Bourbons and their terrible gout, the Hapsburgs and their haemophilia, the mad Romanoffs, the physically handicapped Kaisers— Too little freshness in any blood stream always means the multiplication of the seeds of death that lie within us all.

Even if the lady scientists got busy as hell and figured out a way to get around the disease effects of inbreeding, the girls would learn that they were too hasty in turning in a perfectly good male for a drink of salty water. For mixing its constituent blood streams is the only way to keep the human race (or any species) homogeneous. Do away with the male mixer, and each female family would become unique. Tall women would have taller and taller daughters. Short women would find their descendants getting shorter and shorter. Beautiful ones would develop more and more beauty—but stop! I'll have the boys themselves in favor of this thing yet! It's a fact, though, that every parent would start off a whole new species with every child. Mutations and natural evolution would aggravate the condition until we had humans (technically human) who resembled cats, dogs, and monkeys more than they resembled each other; humans without brains; humans with enormous brains—wait a minute. They'd all be women, so we can leave out that last possibility (STOP THROWING THINGS AT ME, GIRLS!).

Well, all in all, I think that the females should think well before they decide that we males fall in the category of "unnecessary luxuries." When they really apply themselves, they'll probably come to the reasonable conclusion that Ma Nature knew her business after all when she took a rib from Eve and created Adam—"what the hell! Let the poor gimps live. After all, a man *is* a pretty handy thing to have around the house, and we don't mean just to put up screens, either!" IF you see what I mean.

And you might tell Powell to stop giving the ladies any ideas. While I'm sure my argument is sound, I'd hate like hell to have to wait a couple of hundred years before my li'l honey decided to throw away her handful of salt and admit that I wouldn't be nearly so nice if I was a statue carved out of the stuff!

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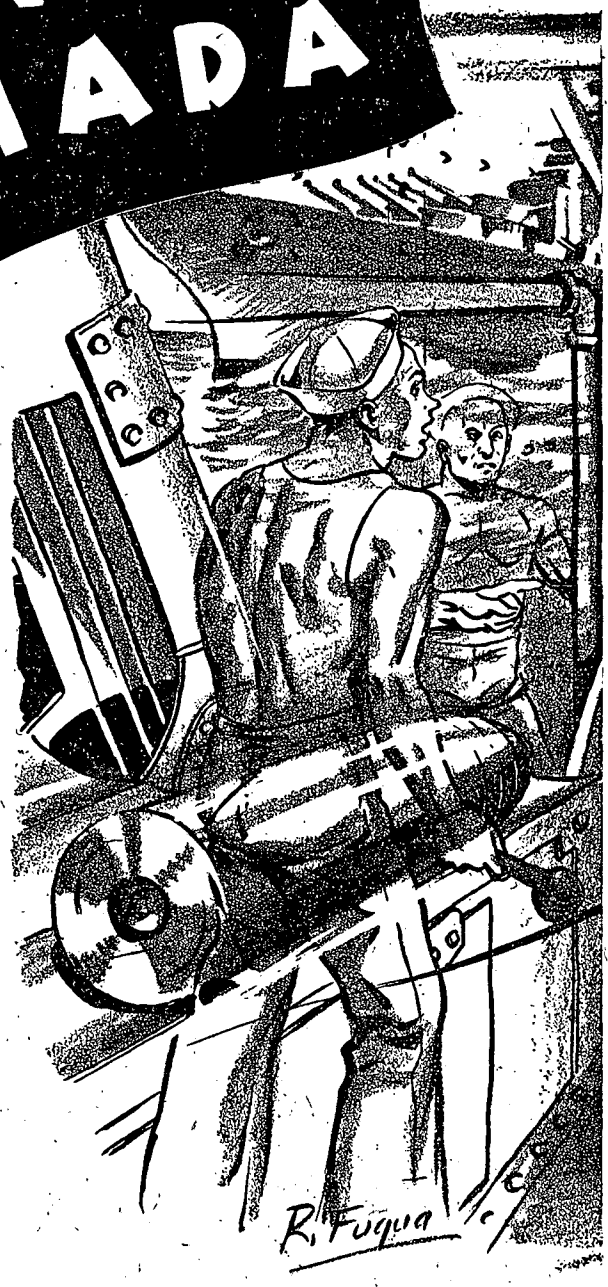
the PHANTOM ARMADA

by

STANTON A. COBLENTZ



THE sudden disappearance of the Inter-American fleet, at the beginning of the Second Hemispheric War of 1982, provided a mystery that has long been the subject of excited speculation, and even now, after fifteen years, has not been officially explained.

The central facts are, of course, well known. The Inter-American fleet, representing the joint forces of the United States, Canada and Latin America, was considered by military authorities to be invincible. Led by the 90,000-ton battleship *Wake Island* (named from one of the outposts in our victorious First Hemispheric War), the fleet was believed to exceed in fire power the combined navies of all the rest of the earth. And so when, on May 10, a treacherous assault was made on our forces by the ten-motored air

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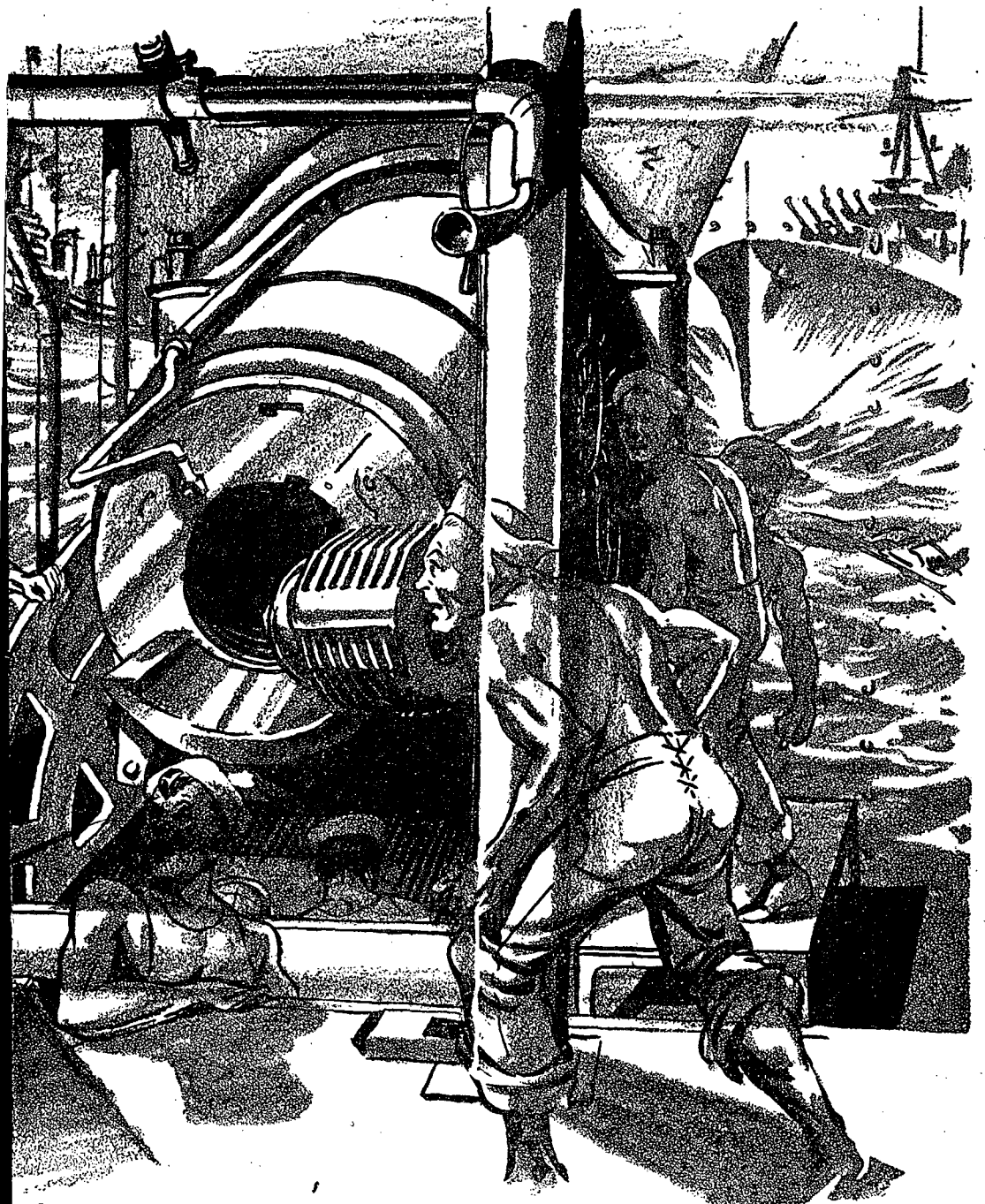
The American fleet set sail in a desperate last-ditch attempt to stop the Japs—and was never seen again!



"We're fading away!" gasped the sailor. "The whole fleet's disappearing!"

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cruisers of the Trans-Asiatic League, there was little doubt in any mind that we would soon annihilate the aggressor.

It was on May 11 that the Navy Department reported that Admiral Carmichael, in charge of the Inter-American squadron, was already at sea on a "punitive expedition." But thereafter the public waited in vain for news of his activities. Not a word as to the *Wake Island* or any of her powerful fleet-sisters was ever brought to the public ear. Nor was any further mention made of Admiral Carmichael. Rumors of disaster did, indeed, circulate in private—rumors neither confirmed nor denied by the authorities.

But meanwhile a series of astonishing events was reported from the Asiatic war-field. The enemy battleship Hiwata and three cruisers of the Koyama class were officially reported to have blown up within an hour in an undisclosed bay on the western Pacific. Three days later, a flotilla of destroyers was wiped out in a manner equally mysterious—the most plausible explanation was that airplanes, operating at an enormous height and equipped with sighting mechanism of unprecedented accuracy, had bombed them out of the waters. Meanwhile blasts of fire, aimed as if from nowhere, were working havoc with Trans-Asiatic shipping, in some cases sinking whole convoys of merchantmen.

But it is unnecessary to dwell upon facts so widely known; nor need I touch at present upon that phenomenal event which closed the hostilities. There are few persons now of mature age who do not recall the universal wonder aroused by that episode—and the almost equal wonder that no mention was made of Admiral Carmichael and the Inter-American fleet either at the time of our triumph or after the conclusion of peace.

It is for this reason that a document recently presented to the press by Glenn Ambrose, an amateur radio enthusiast, takes on peculiar significance. Most papers and magazines, because of the extraordinary if not fantastic nature of Ambrose's claims, have refused to give them space; yet it is my view, after careful study of his story, that it may be less unbelievable than some have supposed, and may in fact account for the missing fleet. In any case, the reader may judge for himself.

On the tenth of November, just six months after the war's start, Ambrose was experimenting with a new method of short-wave reception, which would magnify impressions that ordinarily could be heard but a few miles, and make them audible around the earth. One of the first fruits of the experiment was a message which he took down in shorthand, and which must be regarded as either the most ingenious of hoaxes or the most epoch-making of revelations.

Here, then, is the story—given precisely, Ambrose declares, as he took it down from the short-wave radio:

* * *

I AM making this broadcast strictly against orders. Admiral Carmichael commands that, no matter what the cost to us, the enemy must be kept in ignorance of our great new weapon. But I, Harry Grove, formerly head radio operator on the *Wake Island*, cannot agree with him. At the risk of severe chastisement, but in the hope of being overheard by some sympathetic listener, I am making this broadcast on a small transmitter I rigged up secretly after the ship's main instruments had been destroyed by official orders. In a way, I feel that I have a right to do this; for the "secret

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weapon" is my own invention, which has been responsible for all our successes in the war.

It was really all due to Tommy Durham—yes, to Tommy Durham, my radio mate, and to Cora Holfast's pretty dimpling smile. These may seem worlds apart from the present terrible plight of my shipmates and myself. But the connection is actually very simple. You see, Tommy and I both fell for Cora, and fell hard—and she for her part didn't seem to care so much for either of us. Tommy, with his big, red, moon-like face, had all the freshness of a new-plucked apple, and most girls would have taken to him like a duck to water. I couldn't flatter myself that I would stand up well against him, for I was thin and serious-looking, and couldn't equal Tommy's hearty ringing laughter. Still, she didn't turn me down flat. "If either of you boys accomplish something really worth while, maybe I'll talk to you," she said; and there was an earnest flash in those big blue eyes of hers, which were colored like mountain lakes.

So a competition began between Tommy and me. It was a friendly enough competition, but deadly earnest. To this day I haven't the ghost of an idea what Tom was about, but I knew I had a good head start. Fact is that for months I had been toying with an invention that rather tickled my fancy. But now I put my head to it as if my very life depended on the damned contraption—as it actually did, much more than I realized.

The whole thing began with the idea of smoke-screens and camouflage. If only we could equip our ships to creep up on the enemy without being seen! It was this thought that put me on the track. But if it hadn't been for the lucky chance that showed me phospho-crystaline—or, rather, the unlucky chance! This was a foul-smelling black gas, the main ingredients of which were phosphorus and nitrogen, with sprinklings of two or three other elements. My hope had been to produce a more perfect smoke-screen; but after I had spread phospho-crystalline in minute quantities over any object, I noticed a peculiar effect. Even after the gas had been blown away, the object was only dimly visible!*

A GREATER concentration of the gas, furthermore, could make objects wholly invisible. The effect, to be sure, would wear off after a few hours; but, while it lasted, it was certainly breath-taking!

Now I must confess that, by this time, I had more thought of Cora than of fulfilling my patriotic duties. What a splendid way, I told myself, to steal a march on Tommy! But why not make a real showing? Why not manufacture a large amount of phospho-crystaline, and demonstrate it to the Navy Department? Might it not be able to equip a few torpedo boats or destroyers for surprise raids on the enemy?

As yet, the Second Hemispheric War had not broken out. But when I visited the Third Under-Secretary of Naval Affairs at Washington, and showed him my invention, I found myself in the center of a whirlwind. Some members of the Department were for taking over my invention, and some thought there was something phoney about it. But after a time the pros won out, and I found myself with a check for $10,000 and a reeling head. The only fly in the ointment was that I had to sign over all right and title to phospho-crystaline,

* Phospho-crystaline prevented the rays of light from being deflected or absorbed by any surface it touched—just as if they were drawn through it by a sort of transverse gravity.—Ed.

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and promise never to mention it to any soul, under penalty of being brought to trial for high treason.

This made it a little hard for me with Cora, since I couldn't brag about what I'd done. All I could do was show her the check for ten thousand—at which she merely wrinkled her pretty nose, and said, "Pooh, Mr. Grove! How you going to prove that isn't a forgery?" Well, I couldn't prove it, because I wasn't allowed to explain about my deal with the navy. Worst of all just while I was trying to argue things out, up comes Tommy, smiling so sweetly and innocently I would have liked to knock him over. When Cora told him about the ten thousand, he just roared, and poked me in the ribs, saying, "Why don't you make it ten million, Harry? We'd be just as likely to believe you!" And then, to rub things in, he boasted, "Well, folks, I've got a project coming along that'll make your eyes pop out of your heads one of these days!" With that, he gave Cora his arm, and walked off with her like a cock o' the walk.

Well, you can believe I cursed phospho-crystaline. True, I still had the ten thousand, but somehow it didn't seem to mean so very much. I put the money in the bank, and decided to stick to my job as naval radio operator, while working in my little private laboratory in spare time. It wasn't long afterwards when they transferred me to the *Wake Island*—out of recognition of that damned invention, I suppose. They asked me to name my mate, so I mentioned Tommy, just to keep him out of Cora's way. We went immediately on a Caribbean cruise, and then out into the new Nicaraguan Canal into the Pacific; and no sooner had we got back than the war broke out. There was just time for a flying visit to Cora, who let on that after the war was over maybe she'd accept the one of us with the best record. I could see Tommy's round, good-natured face flushing with joy at this, but I still had hopes of winning out.

WHEN the fleet put to sea, it was a magnificent sight. Twenty super-battleships, led by the *Wake* Island; more than a hundred cruisers; and destroyers and smaller craft as numerous as mosquitoes. We sailed due west across the Pacific for fifteen days . . . until one morning the enemy coast came into view in the far distance. Then a queer thing happened. Puffs of black smoke began shooting all around us, and I recognized the disagreeable, suffocating odor of phospho-crystaline. It didn't please me at all to know they were putting my invention to use; somehow, there was a dull depressing feeling deep down in the pit of my stomach, as if I knew we were in for trouble.

Not that the invention didn't do its work. It was only a few minutes before the *Pearl Harbor,* the *Samoa,* and the other battleships had been blotted out of view. It just seemed that a haze rose all about them, and they weren't there any more. In fact, the whole squadron might have gone to the bottom, for all we could make out. I tell you, it gave me an uncanny feeling. But this wasn't the worst of it. That damnable gas had done its work only too well on our own ship. The decks, the funnels, the turrets, the twenty-two-inch guns—one after one they just faded out, as if they didn't exist any more. This was all the stranger, since we could see things far across the sea as clearly as ever.

At the same time, we ourselves seemed to be dwindling to ghosts. I noticed Tommy, who was in the radio room with me, become paler and paler, until he looked like less than a ghost.

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"Good heaven, Harry," he cried, "I can't see you any more!"

It was true—he couldn't see me. Neither could I see myself. After a time, I couldn't even trace the outlines of my own limbs. I could move about and talk as usual, but I just couldn't see myself. For that matter, I couldn't see where I was. The very walls had been blotted out. I was in danger of colliding with them whenever I tood a step! There came a terrible bang just to my right, and from the curses that followed it, I knew that Tommy had tripped over a chair. At the same time, I heard yells and shouts from the deck, showing that everything was in confusion. But, of course, I couldn't see the deck itself.

"My God," I thought. "Wonder if the authorities foresaw this!" But, in my heart, I knew very well they had not foreseen it.

"However," I reflected, "it doesn't matter very much. In an hour or two, the effects of the accursed gas will begin to wear away."

A heavy shape stumbling against me—which, from the feel of it, I identified as Tommy—put an end to these ruminations.

"Wonder what in hell they've done to us!" he grumbled, with no trace of his usual good spirits. "Some crackbrained scheme of the High Command! If I could only get hold of the fellow who thought up that idea, there'd be one devil less in the world!"

Under the circumstances, I considered that it would show poor tact to avow my connection with phospho-crystaline.

IT WAS only after three or four hours that I began to be really worried. Contrary to expectations, the ships and everything about them remained invisible. There was not even the remotest, haziest suggestion that they would ever be seen again. And this was worse than terrifying—it was bewildering. The effects of phospho-crystalline had not been permanent before. And if they would not wear away now, we were certainly in the devil's own predicament!

"Hey, Grove! Harry Grove! Radio Operator Harry Grove there?"

These words, proceeding from somewhere in the blankness where the deck should have been, caused me to take to my feet so violently that I crashed into one of the bulkheads.

"Here I am, sir!" I called back, although I had no idea who wanted me.

"Admiral Carmichael asks to see you, sir! Can you come over to the bridge?"

"I'll try!" I shouted back, wondering not only why the Admiral wanted to see me, but how he could see me under present circumstances.

It was, to say the least, a perilous adventure to cover the few score yards to the bridge. Feeling my way, in the plight of a blind man, I crept with snail slowness. Once, barely in the nick of time, I saved myself from falling through an open hatch. Once I tripped over some hawsers, and in my sprawling descent came down upon an invisible figure whose curses were terrible to hear. Once I would have pitched to the deck below had it not been for the rail. But somehow, finally, I completed my precarious pilgrimage; and, feeling an open port, heard a voice grumbling from somewhere inside.

"Who the devil is that?"

"I'm looking for Admiral Carmichael, sir."

"Then you've come to the right cabin. What do you want me for?"

Awed to be in the presence of the great man, although neither of us could see the other, I gave my name, and asked if he hadn't sent for me.

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"Yes, damn you! I'm afraid you're the only man, Mr. Grove, who can get us out of this terrible mess."

"I'll be glad to try, sir. But I don't understand just what has happened."

"Neither do any of us. It was you that made this atrocious invention, wasn't it? Now maybe you'll tell me why the effects don't wear off?"

Step by step, we went over the details of what had been done—which is to say, the Admiral and I, along with Chief Engineer Hennessey, who stood at Carmichael's side, although at first I hadn't known it. It appeared that my formula for phospho-crystaline had been followed perfectly, and I couldn't imagine what had gone wrong. That is, not until Hennessey finally admitted, in a slow drawl,

"Tell the truth, it did occur to me to improve the formula by doubling the phosphorus content. Just as an experiment, on an after-thought—"

I am afraid that the words with which I cut him short were blasphemous. Now I understood what had happened. By increasing the percentage of phosphorus, he had stabilized the molecular composition of phospho-crystaline, so producing that very fixation of effects which, in all my experiments, I had striven to avoid. There was no longer any doubt in my mind but that onr invisibility would be permanent! And all because of that idiotic Hennessey!

The Admiral groaned when I gave him this information. But, trying to snatch at any crumb of comfort, he declared.

"Anyhow, damn it, don't know but that an invisible fleet's worth two visible ones. We won't have to worry much about torpedo attacks."

HOWEVER, it soon became evident that an invisible fleet wasn't worth very much after all. At first the vessels tried to keep in touch with one another by radio, but there were several collisions, resulting in two sinkings. Also, the radio beams gave the enemy a way of aiming at us with their pilotless airplanes, so that soon the order went round for the ships to scatter, each for herself, and silence all radios. To this day, I don't know what happened to the rest of the fleet. But I do know that we on the *Wake Island* led the devil's own life. We had to learn everything over again, like men who have lost their eyes, though we could still see well enough at a distance. We had to guide ourselves by the sun, moon and stars, since we couldn't see the compass. We felt our way around for food, and for our hammocks at night; and learned to operate the ship by feel. It's a miracle we didn't end up on a reef. We even put into an occasional port, and what a relief to walk where we could see things, even though people couldn't see us and we started more than one ghost scare! We had to help ourselves to food, water and fuel—which we made a practice of doing in enemy ports, after frightening the wits out of the owners by all sorts of eerie noises.

Yes! There was a certain amount of fun in it all. We even learned to aim and fire our guns, sight unseen; we made targets of little shoals and islets, and found that after a good deal of practice we could hit them fairly well.

Meanwhile we knew from radio reports that other units of the fleet were in action. When we heard of the blowing up of the enemy battleship Hiwata, and later of the destruction of a flotilla of destroyers, we knew our sister ships were acquitting themselves nobly. And we itched for action ourselves. Luckily, we had Admiral Carmichael aboard—which was no mean advantage, as he

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was considered the outstanding naval strategist of the century.

Owing to my invisability, I couldn't help eavesdropping one day on his orders to Vice Admiral Sturgis.

"So long as we don't checkmate that Trans-Asiatic fleet, our own coasts will be exposed to invasion," he pointed out. "So it's up to us to do something—and do it in a hurry!"

"What do you propose, sir? One ship, even if it steams back to America, can't defend a ten-thousand-mile coastline."

"Naturally not. But wouldn't it be a better idea to hunt for the Trans-Asiatic fleet?"

ON THE face of things, this appeared absurd. One battleship to hunt down a whole fleet!—were Admiral Carmichael's wits cracking beneath the strain? Yet, in the end, the idea turned out to be a good deal less foolish than we had thought. I did not, it is true, catch the rest of the Admiral's remarks; but I do know that, the next evening as I took to my bunk, I heard Tommy's voice, triumphant and confidential.

"Congratulate me, old chap! I'm going to get a chance to distinguish myself—yes, sirree, distinguish myself, thanks to my knowing some of those Trans-Asiatic dialects! The Admiral has picked me, with two others, to do his spying for him!"

"Spying?"

"You bet. We'll anchor not far from their great naval base of Akawa, and the three of us are to slip ashore, and try to get some information as to the whereabouts of the fleet. Being invisible, we won't have any trouble listening in on conversations and inspecting official documents."

"Wish you luck!" I grunted. But, to tell the truth, I am not so sure that I did wish him luck. Here was Tommy perhaps about to get the Distinguished Service Award, all on account of that infernal invention of mine! And then, if we ever got home alive and visible, he would have won Cora in the bargain!

But it was useless to lament. Tommy was to perform his mission—and to perform it well.

"Stepped right into official headquarters," he related, on his return from a twenty-four-hour secret tour. "Snatched up some of their papers from under their very eyes; it was enough to make you burst with laughing, to see how hard they looked for them, when all the time they were safely in my pocket. There was one little fellow, with popping spectacled eyes; and a breast all covered with medals, who gave me a shock when he backed into me. But I guess he got a worse shock from the jab I gave him in the ribs. Most likely he's running yet."

"Did you get the Admiral the information he wants?"

"Bet your life! You just wait and see!"

Inwardly I groaned. But, in any case, I did not have long to wait. We began steaming northeast under forced pressure; and, as the *Wake Island* was capable of forty knots, we certainly knew that we were traveling. For three days we kept up the mad race. And then early one morning, as we came out of a fog-bank somewhere in mid-Pacific, we knew where we were going.

Just ahead of us, their faces pointed toward the American coast, was the most formidable array of fighting craft I had ever set eyes upon. The Trans-Asiatics had evidently done much secret building—I counted twenty-five battleships, each of a hundred thou-

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sand tons or over. The cruisers numbered well over a hundred; while the aircraft carriers, destroyers, transports, oil tankers, supply ships and miscellaneous small craft brought the entire flotilla to well over a thousand ships. They spread out over miles of ocean —assuredly, the most powerful armada in history!

"Clear the decks for action! Take battle positions!"

These orders rumbled at us like thunderbolts as we bore down upon the great fleet which, at less than half our speed, went wallowing on its way.

SWIFTLY the guns were manned. The crew, with the invisible sweat dripping down their invisible faces, prepared for the attack which, all of us felt, would be our last.

Straight on and on we plunged. The order to fire did not come; we steered forward until we were directly between two 120,000-ton monsters. Their ugly gray steel shapes, each laden with eight turrets of twenty-five-inch rifles, shot through the waves at about half a mile on either side of us. We could see the black-streaked flag of the Trans-Asiatic League. We could see minute dark forms crowded on the decks. Then, as we waited tensely, there came the order, "Aim!"

At our distance, there could be no question of missing. Our twenty-two-inch guns, pointed across a mere half mile of water at targets each a fifth of a mile long, had no need of a complicated sighting mechanism. Our only prayer was that, during that long moment of waiting, the enemy would not catch a hint of our presence, and open fire first.

"Damn it!" I muttered to Tommy. "If they should see our wake—"

But a fog-bank, not far to our rear, hid most of our wake from view. On and on, still shielded by invisibility, we made our way, until we were a little ahead of the 120,000-ton giants.

"Fire!"

Instantly there burst forth the most terrific blasts imaginable. From both our port and starboard sides, our twenty-two-inch batteries broke into action. Our ship shook with the concussion. We could not, of course, see the spouts of smoke and flame erupting from the mouths of the great guns. But we did see the tornadoes of fire that engulfed the enemy ships. One of them was swept from stem to stern by a conflagration. On the other, a series of deafening explosions broke out, and she listed so sharply to starboard that we knew she was doomed.

"Full speed ahead!" yelled the Admiral, his voice barely audible amid the din. "Fire at will!"

Then, for an hour or more, we were the center of the strangest battle in history. Back and forth, at full speed, we dashed amid the enemy fleet. We fired point blank at ship after ship. Here a cruiser was blasted from the waters; here an aircraft carrier was ripped to splinters; here another battleship was sunk. It was evident that the Trans-Asiatics had been smitten with complete, with mumbling confusion. In their consternation, they could not understand why vessel after vessel was shattered with bolts that burst over the decks as if from nowhere. Finally, when they did begin to recover themselves, their response was such as to bring grim laughter to our lips.

They were firing behind us, more than a quarter of a mile behind us! Now that we had left the fog far astern, our wake was visible a few hundred yards to our rear. But, nearer at hand, it shared our general invisibility, so making it impossible for the enemy to discover our whereabouts as we circled

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and curved continually in their midst.

NO ONE ship, of course, can annihilate a thousand. But we made a point of smashing every one of the battleships; and, in addition, sank eleven aircraft carriers, thirty cruisers, and fifty-nine troop transports, not to speak of a few score supply ships, oil tankers, destroyers, and other small fry. Nothing less than the exhaustion of our ammunition would have made us give up the fight; and, even so, we did not quit before ramming and sinking three or four more vessels just for good measure.

The scene of the battle for miles, when we left it, was ablaze with burning ships. Oil and drifting wreckage, spars, life-rafts, and huge charred timbers, covered the waters; while the scattered remnants of the fleet, some of them listing, some of them with decks caved in and funnels and bridges shot away, turned and fled in all directions, most of them back toward the Asiatic mainland. We knew that many of them would never make port. And—what was more important—we were sure that the survivors would not be a menace to Inter-America.

Thus ended the world's greatest naval encounter—the most astonishing victory since the Spanish Armada was shattered to bits off the British coast. And thus arose the reports which (as we learned from the short-wave radio) circulated throughout Trans-Asia, of a phantom fleet, composed of dozens of craft stronger than any visible battleship—a fleet against which no mortal vessel could compete. And thus, finally, it came about that Trans-Asia sued for peace, which was granted her on terms that would prevent any repetition of her aggression.

As for us, the winners of the victory—our fate is an unenviable one. From shore to shore, like ghosts, we drift unseen—still unable to see one another, much less to communicate with our fellows ashore. However, I am working on a new formula, which promises at last to counteract the effects of phospho-crystalline and restore our visibility. Then we will be able to enter our home port, and Tommy and I will make a bee-line to Cora, who will decide which was the greater feat: his accomplishment in spying so well for the Admiral, or mine in contriving the invention that destroyed the Trans-Asian squadron.

I am making this broadcast in the hope that some one who hears it will bring the news to Cora. Tell her I expect to come! Tell her that I will claim a very dear reward for making the trickiest, most terrible, most marvelous, priceless and fortunate invention in Inter-American history!

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE!

GERMANY, ever probing the depths of science to further her militaristic aims, has by an inexpensive process impregnated wood with metal.

Classifying the type of wood and determining its future use, heated liquid metal is pressed forcefully into the dry wood. When the process is completed the wood takes on a metallic gleam and the surface resembles metal.

When polished the new material gleams brightly. It can be cut, nailed, bored, glued and sawed. Weather does not affect it in any way. Chemicals and fire are not injurious to its toughened fiber and it will not blister or split.

☆

HOW TO STOP WORRYING

A RADICAL, but successful surgical operation is that which severs the frontal lobes and other parts of the brain. This operation is resorted to for relief in extreme cases of melancholy.

Imagination, foresight, daydreams, etc., are governed by the front part of the brain. These lobes are not the centers of intelligence or emotion.

This operation tends to eliminate fear, anxiety, and inferior complexes. It has been performed on about one person a month.

Perhaps in the future, science progressing ever onward, this brain-severing operation will be no more dangerous than a tonsilectomy.

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☆ BROTHER

by NELSON S. BOND

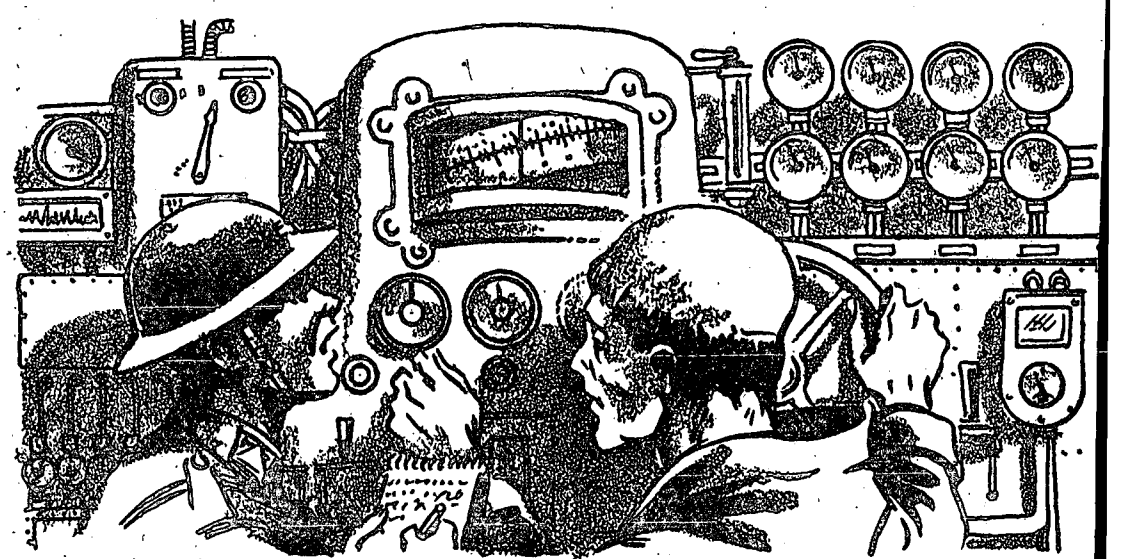
Who was this mysterious brown-garbed figure who popped up in the middle of war-torn France and spoke so wisely and terribly of her fate?

THE real Press Club in Manhattan is not behind that sober brownstone front and shining brass plate you pass on 42nd Street. That's just a front maintained by the boys to impress the general public and visiting firemen with their respectability. The *real* Press Club is up one block and two to the right and down a short flight of steps to a green-curtained spa which calls itself simply, *Al's Place*.

That's where the gentlemen of the working press congregate. Don't make the mistake of going there hoping to make the acquaintance of some word-slinger whose byline is familiar to you. You won't be welcomed. If you're not escorted by one of the boys in the know, a roar of disapproval will greet your entrance. And even if you're thick-skinned enough to ignore that concerted "Get out!", you'll discover when you place your order at the bar that Al is fresh out of whatever brand of alcoholic refreshment you call for.

Al's Place is strictly for shareholders in the Fourth Estate. No laymen, sob-sisters, long-hairs, or persons who call themselves "journalists" are solicited. Al is loyal to the newspaper men. He maintains for them a strictly private establishment; the true, unofficial Press

"No," said Brother Michel, "what you see on the screen hasn't happened—yet!"



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MICHEL ☆

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Club. And they, appreciatively, maintain Al in a style to which a thousand less fortunate barmen would like to become accustomed.

WE WERE sitting there one night, giving this cockeyed world the good old double-oh, taking busman's holiday as newsmen will, discussing beats we'd made and missed in our daily tussle with Old Man Deadline. Pinky Crockett of the *Intelligencer* was in reminiscent mood.

"My favorite story of all time," he said, "is the one about the cub who—"

"I'm empty again," interrupted Bud Callison of the *Blade*. "Who'll have another of the same? All around? Al!"

"The cub who was sent to Harlan, Kentucky," persisted Pinky, "during the coal strike—"

"You see what Peg said this morning?" asked Jerry Travers, the *Clarion* city man. "He gave John L. fits for that defense tie-up in Indiana. Damn good thing, too."

"This cub," continued Crockett doggedly, "got a rush of words to the brain and started shoving mellerdrammer over the wire to his city editor. You know how cubs write, anyhow. Perpetual emotion. He started off something like, 'God sits brooding tonight on a little hill overlooking Harlan—' "

Ordinarily Pinky would have been allowed to finish his story, ancient as it was. But tonight he was in disgrace. We were giving him the quick-freeze treatment for having yesterday failed to cover for a buddy who was suddenly taken drunk.

Phil Grogan of the *Times-Star* yawned ostentatiously. "Yeah, we know. So the C.E. wired back, 'The hell with Harlan; interview God!' Put these on my chit, Al. Okay, boys—down the hatch!"

Crockett gave up and swallowed his drink in contrite silence. I guess we all felt a little bit sorry for him, then, because conversation languished until Grayson took the ball: He said thoughtfully, "That was a typical cub boner. But you know, I think I can almost understand how that kid felt when he started filing his epic. There are some stories that are just too damn big to play down. They seem to scream for dramatic presentation. Of course, you can't write them that way, so you don't write them at all. And the world loses a story that might—mind I say *might*—be of tremendous importance."

We looked at him in some astonishment. Grayson was just three days in by clipper from Lisbon, which haven of safety he had reached just one hop-skip-and-jump ahead of a bunch of Gestapolecats who wanted most desperately to create an international incident with Grayson as the *cause celebré*.

Grayson's stories out of the Low Countries, then out of *blitzed* Paris and occupied France were Pulitzer Award stuff, but they hadn't endeared him to the Reich official news fabricators. They were harsh and cold and brutal and devastatingly revealing. Grayson wrote that way. Thus it was astounding to hear him defend a dramatic style of presentation. Callison shook his head. "A gag, Grayson?" he ventured. "I don't get it."

"It's no gag," said Grayson soberly, "it's the God's honest truth." He wrapped his long fingers around his highball glass, stared at, through, and beyond us. "Once—" he said, "perhaps only once in a newspaperman's career, he stumbles upon the perfect story. The story that has everything. Plot, incident, drama, and—more important than all these things—significance. When such a story comes, it should be written as befits its importance. And yet—"

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HE PAUSED. Travers said, "You're holding out, Grayson. Have you found such a story? Then why the hell don't you write it, man? Use any style you damn well please. Write it in Choctaw or Sanscrit if it's that good."

"It's better," said Grayson simply, "but I won't write it. There's no use. Because, you see, no paper would print it. There are limits to what the public will believe. A story like this—"

I said, "But you can tell us, can't you, Grayson? Off the record, if you like."

He smiled wanly. "Off or on, Len, it doesn't make any difference. It still wouldn't be believed. But I *would* like to tell you. If you'd be interested—"

"We're all," I told him, "agog."

"Well," he said, "after Paris I went to Tours . . ."

AFTER Paris he went to Tours. That was not so easy as it sounded. Only two hundred and forty kilos separated the two cities. A month ago it was possible to negotiate the distance in a trifle over three hours. That was before the grim, clanking line of mechanized Nazi soldiery scythed the frightened populace out of its homes and onto the narrow roadways of France. Now the four hundred mile stretch of road between Paris and Bordeaux was packed solidly with a sluggish stream of refugees. Dazed little people, hurt children of a toppling empire who did not yet clearly understand what had happened. Whose only urge was to keep moving, ever south, away from the pain and noise and confusion that had uprooted them.

Grayson was the last of the American newsmen to leave Paris. He could have gone almost a week before with Ted Downs of the INS, or a couple of days ago with Reynolds, but had turned down both offers of a lift. Some said Paris was to be conceded without a struggle, but there were counter-rumors that not so easily would the pleasure capital of the world be taken. Grayson conceived it his duty as a newspaperman to be on hand if something should happen. Until Billy Wallace of Universal talked turkey to him.

"You're getting out of here, Stu—but fast! It's only a matter of days, hours maybe, before the Germans march in. It's all right for a few dopes like me to stick around. Our noses are clean. But Herr Goebbels has your name written on his black list in capital letters. If they come in and find you here, it's going to be just too bad!"

Grayson said, "I'm sticking. They won't dare touch me. I'm an accredited press man from a neutral country—"

"So was Webb," pointed out Wallace. "But they got him. And in London, of all places. You can't tell *me* he just up and fell off that platform. He had cat-eyes. Now, look, chum—I've got a Baby Austin downstairs I've been saving to get buried in. It's no good to me, 'cause when the Nazis get here they're going to empty the town of petrol. But it has a full tank now. So you hop in it, point your nose south—then follow your nose like a bat out of hell!"

So now Stu Grayson was in Tours. But already Tours was not the place where he should be. For the Nazi bombers had come with the monotonous regularity of passenger trains at home—every hour on the hour—and dropped their flame-spewing, death-dealing visiting cards on the ancient city.

The government had fled again; this time to Bordeaux. The news correspondents had followed them, and all France, it seemed, clogged the southward road.

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There was only one thing for Grayson to do. Keep moving. Of the details of his flight he was never afterwards certain. There are certain boundaries of horror beyond which the human mind refuses to take cognizance. Later, Grayson discovered that upon his mind's retina had been imprinted sights and scenes that at the time of their occurrence made no impression on him.

THE strafing of civilian-packed highways by swastika-marked pursuit planes which swooped down upon the roads, machine guns chattering leaden death into the defenseless fugitives. The sprawling, grotesque bodies in their wake. The scores upon endless scores of derelict motor vehicles abandoned by the roadside as the way grew longer and the petrol supplies shorter. The faces of the fugitives. ("Their faces," said Grayson. "At night I see their faces and their eyes. Not wracked with pain or fear or anger, but blank with bewilderment. They were numb with the shock of their betrayal.")

Grayson never reached Bordeaux. He was in Angoulême when the incredible rumor filtered through the fugitive column that the Renaud cabinet had resigned; that in Petain's withered hands now rested the fate and future of France. An uglier rumor came concurrently. There was talk of a separate peace. The bistro attendant from whom Grayson heard these things discounted his own words.

"So one hears without authority, m'sieu," he said cautiously. "But surely it cannot be of the truth. Petain of Verdun would never surrender to *les Boches*."

But the rumor was verified, sickeningly, the next day. The octogenarian Marshal was no longer the same Petain whose *On ne passe pas* had emblazoned a watchword of valor and defiance into French history a quarter century before. His humble capitulation, his call to the French soldiers to lay down their arms, his plea to the Reich for an armistice were the last, crushing humiliation to an already spiritless people.

Grayson heard the news with a sense of quickening fear. Billy Wallace's warning now assumed new meaning. His name *was* on the Gestapo black list. If, as most assuredly they would, the Nazis occupied France or most of it, in the resultant upheaval and confusion the disappearance of one small American news correspondent would pass almost unnoticed.

It was madness to continue into Bordeaux. His only chance of safety lay in flight to Spain, or—Grayson snapped his fingers—or better still, Marseille. He had friends in Marseille. Also if there were an occupation of that *Provencal* port it would probably be by the junior partners of the Axis. And the Italians were disposed to be friendly to Americans; particularly American newspapermen.

So Grayson shifted his course southeastward through Brive and Figeac, following secondary highways to expose himself as infrequently as possible to curious local officials. Past Rodez and Le Vigan, where it was easier to get gas but harder to get information. Then down the Rhone valley into St. Remy and Salon. It was there he met Frère Michel.

HE REACHED Salon in the dark of night, a phrase that was particularly apt since the town was, like every other in stricken France, swaddled beneath the mantle of a complete blackout. Grayson could not help thinking that this total absence of light represented Marianna's mourning. Yet the blackout was more than mere sym-

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bolism; it was stark necessity as well. For although there was a well-confirmed rumor that Petain had already met the new Attila with the opera-bouffé moustache in the historic railway car at Compeigne and signed armistice terms, the cessation of hostilities was yet a night, a day, and another night in the offing.

This was a small but typical indication of the victor's vindictiveness. The vanquished had been ordered to lay down their arms immediately, yet still the planes of the conquerors swarmed over all of France bombing, burning, destroying, in the hectic last hours of pseudo-truce. Particularly was this true in southern France where, the waspish Morannes having been grounded, the Italian airmen were free to make a final, braggart display of their prowess.

So Grayson reached Salon in the dead of night, winding cautiously into the village through groves fragrant of olive and almond, past a dim-jutting wall built twenty centuries before by legionnaires whose fasces had been surmounted with the emblem SPQR.

He was nearly into the village proper when overhead he heard the high, thrumming drone of motors. Then the spiralling scream of falling death, then before him—so near that his tires rocked crazily on the shuddering earth, and the steering wheel struggled against his grip—the darkness bursting suddenly asunder in a pillar of crimson flame.

Instinctively Grayson stepped on the brakes. He had no fear of night bombing. He had for it, rather, the contempt of long familiarity. His only recognizable emotions were anger at thus being hindered in his flight and a fierce scorn for such an obvious and useless exhibition of terrorism on the part of the Italian airforce. He knew, as they must also know, that the lazy village of Salon concealed no military objectives more important than the ancient, ravaged fortifications of the 15th Century. The canal of Craponne was a mere irrigation ditch.

But furious or not, he was under fire. And dangerously so. He heard cries before him, and the jet streets were illumined with a blaze that etched his surroundings in stark relief. Beside him loomed a massive, Gothic building. Its ramparts of staunch stone offered refuge. He abandoned his car and raced for the wall, seeking an entrance.

He could find none. He felt his way blindly, helplessly, along the wall as the motors droned overhead, as the bombing increased in fury, and the whole village trembled beneath thudding shocks. Then suddenly, startingly, there was a quiet voice calling to him.

"Messire! Viens-tu, messire!"

THE call came from a shadowy figure in an arched niche. Grayson lurched gratefully toward the gateway.

"Thanks, friend," he panted. "Tony's really making things hot, no? Where's the shelter?"

"Tu es ung Anglaise?" His accoster seemed faintly surprised. *"A bas, messire."*

He led the way through a short, walled corridor, down a stone staircase mildewed with age, into a slab-lined cell so closely joined that it seemed to have been hewn of solid rock. Grayson heaved a sigh of relief. This was more than safety; it was sanctuary. When his companion closed the huge metal door behind them, engulfing silence stifled even the pounding reverberations of the holocaust above.

Some inner chamber of Grayson's consciousness had recognized an abnormality about the *Provencal* stranger with whom he was now closeted. But

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in the haste and excitement of their meeting his mind had not found time to analyze his reaction. Now the man spoke again.

"Dictes-moy—" he said softly, "Tell me, my son, whence comest thou?"

And Grayson knew what it was that had struck him as unusual. The stranger not only addressed him in the familiar *tu* form, but he spoke in a *patois* so awkward and heavy as to seem almost archaic.

It was not the typical tongue of the district. Grayson had spent so much time in the Midi and was familiar with the strong, resonant accent of the *Provencalese,* the heavy vowels and rolling r's. This was more like—Grayson strained for recognition that eluded him—more like the French *patois* spoken by the Canucks of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. An antique French derived from the tongue of Ronsard and Villon.

He was thankful, now, for his many salmon killing trips to the Gaspé. He answered slowly, choosing his words with care. "From Paris. I was on my way to Marseille, whence I hope to find a ship to England. My name is Grayson. Stuart Grayson."

His companion lighted, now, a stub of candle, placed it in a shallow wall sconce. By its guttering flare Grayson saw an older man, sturdily built, whose heavy beard was faintly salted with gray. A man lofty of brow and deep of eye, garmented in a long black robe that might be either a cassock or a scholar's gown. That, thought Grayson, explained his use of the familiar "thee." Priests customarily used it, as did masters addressing their pupils.

The older man nodded quietly. "I am called," he said, "Michel. Michel de—"

He gave the place name of a small cathedral town in northern France. But Grayson was only half listening. He was glancing curiously about the chamber in which they stood. *"Ou sommes-nous, m'sieu?* Where are we? This is no *new* bomb shelter."

"No, my son, we are in the vault below the church of St. Laurent."

"Below?" Grayson studied his surroundings with new understanding. "Then these are—"

"The crypts, yes. The birds of death spew flame and violence above us, but here we are safe in the company of the imperishable dead. I, myself," said the old man, "shall some time rest here. Yea, shall and in thy day, do."

HIS words, thought Grayson, were vague and more than a little confusing. But recent events had addled the brains of men more important than this small town monk or sage. So he didn't press the question. He asked instead, "How long do you think this will last? I must get away from here tonight to make Marseille by morning. Tomorrow's probably the last day I'll be able to get out of the country. Before the Fascists march in."

The old man shook his head. "You can judge better of that than I, my son. I cannot say. But—" A curious eagerness lighted his eyes. "But you spoke of Paris. What has happened there? Why do you flee?"

Grayson answered shortly, "Don't tell me you haven't heard? Paris has fallen. France has surrendered. Tomorrow she becomes an occupied country like Poland and Norway and the rest. But you must know these things. Where have you been, anyway?"

"I have been—" The old man hesitated, "—traveling, my son. I am but newly come here. What you tell me is unexpected. So France bleeds again! Will she never find peace?"

"Not while there's a Hitler," said Grayson grimly. "Or a Nazi party."

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A long pent anger burst within him. "The tragedy is we should have seen this coming long ago. The handwriting was on the wall if we'd only had sense enough to read it. The sects and creeds that sprang up in post-war Germany. The Neo-paganism trend. We thought it was an escape valve. Actually it was the forging of a new national philosophy that despised death, gold, honor—everything but the domination of the world."

His companion studied him appraisingly. "Thus it was, my son?"

"That's how it was," said Grayson bitterly. "I was as blind as the rest of them. Yet it's supposed to be my job to see things coming. I'm a newspaperman."

"And your country, England, is also in this war?"

"England is, yes. But that's not my country. I'm an American," Grayson told him.

"I see. An American writer. I, too, am a writer, my son. A—a poet, of sorts. Perhaps you know my verses?"

Grayson shook his head. "I'm afraid—"

The old man sighed. "I had hoped my work might be familiar to you. It is a history. A history in verse. Each new day, each new journey, adds another chapter. That which you have just told me is worthy of a stanza—

"En germanie," he said, "naistront diverse sectes S'approchant fort de l'heureux paganisme . . ."

"In Germany will spring up different sects,
Closely approaching a careless paganism . . .
A new sect of philosophers
Despising death, gold, honor, and riches—"

IT WAS, thought Grayson, pretty lousy verse. Not only that, but it was in damn bad taste. Years hence, when this was all over and men could look back upon what was now happening with a detached analytical view, there would be histories of the period. But they would not, he felt sure, be poorly rhymed histories written in a jumbled, archaic *patois* by a dingy *maitre*—for so by now Grayson had decided his companion to be—from an obscure village.

Still, you couldn't tell a man who had befriended you and possibly saved your life that his verse was bad and he was half cracked. Grayson turned toward the door, opened it. "It's quiet, now. They must have gone. Shall we go up?"

"As you wish, my son. But tell me first—this Hitler you spoke of? Has he gained many followers?"

"Too many. His own countrymen, the Italians; even the newspapers thought for a while he was a good thing for Germany. He was restoring a nation in chaos, they said. He had admirers here and in England. They saw the National Socialistic state as a buffer between the democracies and Soviet Russia. But when the chips went down they discovered that Socialism and Nazism were one and the same. The democracies were caught in the middle. Well—"

They had reached the great arched gateway by now. The bombers had gone, leaving part of the little town ablaze behind them. The streets of Salon were a wild confusion, but Grayson felt that was an advantage to him rather than a hindrance. He held out his hand.

"Well, goodbye, sir. And thank you for your help."

"Go thou in peace, my son," said the old man.

And Grayson turned to the spot where he had left his car. Only to pull

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up with a cry. The Austin no longer existed save as a heap of twisted metal. A crater yawned in the street where it had stood; fused at the bottom of the crater lay the ruins of the vehicle he had hoped would bear him to safety.

His cry brought Michel to his shoulder. "What is it?"

"My car;" choked Grayson. "Smashed to smithereens. I doubt if there's another one in town. I wouldn't dare look for it anyway. And if I'm not in Marseille by morning—"

It was at that moment, in midsentence, that the sun and Grayson's world collided. Stars roared hurtling to earth in a crash of tumultuous thunder. He was aware of a dreadful concussion plucking him from his feet, tossing him bodily back through the arch into the corridor beyond . . . of the taste of hot salt blood in his mouth and pain that lanced his body with agony . . . then a crushing earth, and darkness surging up to meet him . . .

GRAYSON said, "Al—" Al, who had been listening from behind the bar, started violently. "Set 'em up, Al. Same thing all around."

Al said, "Yessir, right away, Mr. Grayson."

Phil Grogan said, "Wait a minute, Stu. This round's on me."

"Me," corrected Grayson. "I owe you all one for having listened to me thus far. I'm sorry I ever started. It's a whacky story. And it gets even whackier."

"Put it away," said Grogan. "Your money's no good in this joint."

Grayson shrugged. "Well, O.K. But you see, now, what I meant when I said this was a story no newspaper could print. I'm convinced that it's the greatest, most important, most significant thing that ever happened to me, and possibly that ever happened to any living soul. But I can't prove it. Because, you see, I was injured in the delayed explosion of that time bomb.

"You—I suppose you know how I got to Lisbon?"

"By boat," said Callison. "Wasn't it by boat?"

"That's what I told them," said Grayson, "to explain my presence there. But I don't know. I don't *think* so, but I honestly don't know.

"After I'd been there a few days and come to my senses a bit, I covered the waterfront like a bloodhound looking for some skipper who remembered having had me as a passenger. I found none. Still, that doesn't signify, for ships were constantly shuttling in and out of Portugal in those hectic days.

"So here starts the hair-thin line, on the one side of which lies fact, and the other side fancy. Perhaps what I am about to tell you really happened to me. I think it did. On the other hand, you must remember that I was injured and possibly delirious. The while thing may have been a wild fantasy, born of the night and the crypt and the horror and the strange old sage who spoke in a Villonesque *patois*."

"Suppose," I suggested, "you get on with the story?"

"Well—" said Grayson . . .

GRAYSON'S wakening was like the rising of a diver from a dark, swirling depth into a weirdly unfamiliar world. It was not that he suffered bodily pain. By some miracle he had escaped all injury except a few bruises. But the fierce, close explosion of the delayed bomb had dealt his nervous system a violent blow. It was shell-shock, though he didn't know it then. He didn't know anything at the time of his awakening. Not his name, nor where he was, nor what he was doing here, or above all who might be the

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bearded stranger bending over him.

He pushed himself up on one elbow and moaned as a myriad tiny cogs in his brain seemed to shriek rebellion at the movement. "Where am I?" he asked.

"Peace, my son," his companion soothed him gently. "You are safe now."

Wisps of recollection seeped back upon Grayson. A once-heard name eluded him. He grasped at it . . . caught it. "You are—Father Michel."

"*Brother* Michel, my son," corrected the old man. "Now rest, and be still. All will be well soon."

"And this is the crypt," murmured Grayson. "No, it is not the crypt!" His eyes widened as he scanned his surroundings. They were neither on the open streets of Salon nor the underground refuge where they had taken temporary shelter. They were in what seemed to be a sort of metal cubicle. The interior of their room or conveyance—Grayson could not tell which, though a faint, almost imperceptible swaying motion led him to believe it was the latter—was Spartan in its simplicity. Only on one wall were set several levers and a dial, the purpose of which Grayson could not remotely hazard.

"No, we are no longer in the crypt," said Frère Michel.

"Then, where—?" asked Grayson confusedly.

Brother Michel's voice was calm and his hands were deft as they moved the levers on the forward wall. "It was needful that you be brought away, my son. You were hurt and in danger. Only thus could I bear thee to a friendlier spot." His brows contracted into a mild frown. "I had not meant that any save myself should ever look upon this conveyance. But surely it cannot be of harm if one single time I concern myself in affairs that are to be. And who knows but it was thus planned, by He who ordains all?"

HIS meaning was obscure, his actions even more so. And it pained Grayson to try to concentrate. His thought processes were thick and sluggish, as though stifled beneath a comforter of down. He did not understand. Never during that weird voyage did he clearly understand what was transpiring about him. It was as though he drifted in a febrile dream peopled with strange sights and scenes.

Brother Michel was speaking again, but Grayson heard his words only fitfully. "Let us go up the stream a little way, my friend. I would learn what is to come of that which we have seen. Shortly I shall return thee to thy proper place."

He tugged yet another of the intricately wrought levers, and it seemed to Grayson that the floor beneath him shuddered for a moment in impatient flight. Then;

"This should be—far enough," said Brother Michel. "Let us see what now transpires."

What window or portal he opened, Grayson could not say. But where had been shadowy darkness, now warm sunlight flooded the chamber, and it seemed they looked down upon the fields of France from towering heights. ("It was as though," said Grayson, "we were in a plane. But it wasn't that. Even in my dazed condition I'm sure I would have recognized the drone of airplane motors. And besides, did you ever know a plane to stop and hover over a single spot, motionless? That's what we did.")

So they looked down upon the fields of France. But these were not the lazy, quiet fields through which Grayson had driven in his pellmell flight from Paris.

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This *champs* was abustle with activity. Widespread upon the great plain, so far as the eye could see, were massed men and troops and armament. Westward lay the rolling sea. Ships lay in the harbor; grim, gaunt dogs of war. Armed barges lined the beach. A clouded instinct for news stirred Grayson. Forgetting to be astonished that so swiftly could the occupation of France have been accomplished, he cried, "Invasion! They're preparing for an invasion of Britain!"

The old man shook his head, smiling sagely. "Nay, my son. That attempt I saw thwarted while you slept. Not yet shall England admit a foe. Look again at the banners of the warriors."

AND Grayson, looking again, saw that he had indeed misjudged the nationality of those assembled on the seacoast plain. Their uniforms were not the gray-green of the Nazi troops. There were blue uniforms and khaki, olive, and even plaid. And Grayson marked at different points throughout the camp banners he recognized. The tricolor of France; the St. George's cross of England. The flags of Poland and Norway and Belgium, the Netherlands and tiny Portugal.

He turned to his companion confusedly. "But I don't understand. This is an army of the Allies—on French soil! But France has fallen. And the English were driven out at Dunkirk."

"Time passes swiftly, my son," said "Brother Michel, "and with its passage many changes are wrought. Hear! Even now the bugle sounds! The army of exiled and vanquished sets forth to reclaim its own. Let us see what shall come of it."

As suddenly as light had blossomed in the small conveyance, it faded. Once again they were walled in foursquare metal. There was that sensation of flight. Then Brother Michel's pronouncement.

"This should be Rome—shortly hence."

And where he had seen below him the army of the Allies Grayson found himself looking down upon the Seven Hills of the ancient city. But it was a fearful scene upon which he gazed. A scene of flame and ruin, fire and death and desolation. Sky-searing tongues of flame swept avenues that once charmed a world with their beauty. Great craters yawned where had stood milestones of a glorious elder culture. The charred, abandoned hulk of one once magnificent edifice brought a cry of horror to Grayson's lips.

"The Heart of Rome! Even this great capital destroyed!"

Said Frère Michel. "Even so, my son. Thus ends the folly of the second pretentious Cæsar.

"Romaine pouvoir," he said, as though committing a verse to mind aganist some future setting down, *"sera de tout a bas . . .*

"Roman power will be completely brought low
O Great Rome, thy ruin approaches,
Not only of thy walls but of thy blood and substance . . ."

IT WAS then that something of Grayson's dull-witted acceptance slipped from him. His slow mind began to comprehend that which he had seen, and a great, incredulous wonder gripped him. He turned to his companion feverishly.

"What magic is this Frère Michel? Where are we? What are we doing? How are we seeing these things? These events cannot be!" He pounded his temples as an effort toward coherent thought drove bright hammers of pain through him. Logic supplied but one

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answer. "Am I—" he demanded fearfully, "Am I insane?"

Frère Michel turned, smiling gently. "Peace, my son, you are not insane. You are but tired and ill. Rest, now, and in a moment more I shall leave you in a haven of safety."

He touched Grayson's brow and the touch of his hand was soothing. Grayson's panic left him. He slept then, and perhaps in slumber found healing, for when he wakened again his mind was clearer and he heard the words of his companion without confusion.

"We have come, my friend."

Grayson roused himself. "Come? Come where?"

"To the land of the Lusitains. We are on the outskirts of Lisbon. You will find the city without trouble."

Grayson stumbled to his feet. It was as his companion had said. "But—but how did we get here?"

"Through the highway of that which is to be, we have returned to the now," said the old man strangely. "Go now, my son, in peace. And if you will, tell they who tremble and are afraid of that which you have seen. Bid them be of good heart, confident that liberty and justice shall not yet pass. For I, Michel of the tribe of Isaachar, have seen so and now so tell you. Perhaps if you seek in some hidden place you may find written that which I have yet to write. Look for it, my son. It will open to you many doorways of hidden knowledge. And now, farewell!"

He stepped back into the curious metal cage which for a time had borne them both. Then suddenly it and he were gone. A great weakness and a nausea overcame Grayson. He did not remember walking into the city . . .

GRAYSON stopped. "Well," he said. "That's all. That's the story."

There was a faint half smile upon his lips, but in his eyes a sort of eagerness, a sort of wistful desire for understanding.

I think we all looked at him stupidly for a few minutes. I know I did. Phil Grogan broke the silence. He said, "Damn it, Stu, *what* story? I don't get it. You drew a blank in the south of France, had a delirious dream about an old monk who talked double-talk—and you say that's the greatest story you ever ran into! Am I just plain dumb, or is there something I've missed?"

"I have already told you," said Grayson soberly, "that the story could never be printed. You must make two assumptions before it makes any sense whatsoever. The first is that though I was shocked I was not delirious, and that the things I saw really happened to me. The second—"

"Well?" said Callison.

"I didn't understand the second myself until some time later," said Grayson slowly. "Not until, completely baffled by a mystery I couldn't explain, I did a little intensive research.

"I discovered some rather peculiar facts connected with the town of Salon and the church of St. Laurent. Buried in the crypt beneath that church lie the remains of one who in his day was famed as astrologist, prophet, and seer. A curious, secretive man, descended of the Jewish tribe of Isaachar whose priests—or so the legends tell—during the Exodus bore away something far more precious than silver or gold. The documents from the initiation chambers of the Egyptian temples. All the geometric, algebraic, and cosmographic formulæ by which it is said the Egyptian priests could divine the future.

"That's not so funny as it sounds. There are many, even today, who will tell you that in the construction of the great pyramid of Cheops was outlined

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the trend of human events for more than five thousand years to come.

"This French frère of the 17th Century—suppose he had somehow inherited this now lost secret? Suppose it were not so esoteric as mechanistic? Oh, I know you think I'm talking nonsense, but—I was there. I saw those things myself. And later, studying the rhymed history of the future written by this prophet, I found not only a 'prediction' of those things which he and I had together seen, but read also the actual words we had spoken to one another!"

CROCKETT stared at him incredulously. "But you're talking about *time* travel, Grayson! You're saying this prophet was no charlatan but a man who had actually gone forward and seen—"

"I'm not *saying*," corrected Grayson, "I'm only—wondering. I think a lot of people are wondering, too, in view of the fact that in this prophet's book, *The Centuries*, appear predictions that one by one, over a four hundred year period, have come true. Complete with names, dates, places.

"It is implausible, yes. But is it impossible that I should have met him on one of his investigatory flights? I think not. I hope not. For if my hunch is right, I have seen in advance that which all of us will rejoice to read of in the days to come. The fall of Rome, the triumph of Britain, the coming of a more peaceful, happier, world."

Crockett said, "But what's this man's name, Stu? I don't remember any Michel—"

"That was not all his name," said Grayson. "There was more of it. I told you his name as I heard it before I had greater understanding. Michel de Nostre-Dame was his full name. We know him by another name today. We call him—Nostradamus."

Advertisement

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do — well — there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well — this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well — just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 36, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now — while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable — but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was. — Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

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Romance of the Elements - - - Iodine

IT WAS FROM ASHES OF SEAWEED GATHERED ALONG FRENCH SHORES, THAT BERTRAND COURTOIS, IN 1811, ISOLATED IODINE. ONE DAY HE ADDED SULPHURIC ACID TO A "MOTHER LIQUID" HE OBTAINED BY EXTRACTING SEAWEED ASHES WITH WATER; WHEN HE DISTILLED IT, BEAUTIFUL VIOLET VAPORS AROSE, THEN CONDENSED IN HIS RETORT TUBE TO FORM DARK, LUSTROUS, METALLIC-LIKE CRYSTALS.

MEDIAEVAL REMEDY

AS EARLY AS 1170 A.D., THE PEOPLE OF PALERMO, ITALY, WERE USING THE ASHES OF SPONGES FOR TREATMENT OF GOITER! SPONGES, LIKE SEAWEED AND OTHER MARINE GROWTHS, ARE RICH IN IODINE.

IN THE 1820'S RUMORS FLEW THAT SWITZERLAND'S DR. COINDET WAS USING IODINE TO CURE GOITER, SO PEOPLE BEGAN TAKING IT WITHOUT MEDICAL ADVICE. WHEN MANY SICKENED AND SOME DIED THEY VIOLENTLY CONDEMNED IODINE AS A "VIRULENT POISON."

WHILE SOJOURNING IN PARIS IN 1813 SIR HUMPHREY DAVY OF ENGLAND GOT HIS HANDS ON SOME IODINE. SECRETLY INSTALLING A PORTABLE LABORATORY IN HIS HOTEL ROOM, HE HURRIEDLY TESTED THE SUBSTANCE BETWEEN PARTIES GIVEN IN HIS HONOR BY UNSUSPECTING FRENCH SCIENTISTS. BUT GAY-LUSSAC SAVED THE DAY FOR FRANCE BY BEING FIRST TO ANNOUNCE ITS PROPERTIES. . .

BAUMAN FOUND IODINE IN THE THYROID GLAND IN 1885. INDEED, THIS ELEMENT IS PRESENT IN MOST ALL ANIMAL AND PLANT ORGANISMS. IODINE, IT IS SAID, IS A GREAT DEVELOPER OF THE GREEN PIGMENT IN PLANTS. IN THE FORM OF CERTAIN SALTS, IODINE IS USED EXTERNALLY AND AS A COUNTER-IRRITANT

IODINE is number 53 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is I, and its atomic weight is 126.932. It is a shining, blackish-gray, crystalline solid. It has a specific gravity of about 4.95. It is chiefly found in "Chile-saltpeter" ($NaNO_3$). It is soluble in alcohol, carbon disulfide, chloroform, aqueous potassium iodide. It is used in the manufacture of coal-tar dyes, iodoform, in medicine, photography, and in chemical analysis. Iodine is an oxidizing agent.

NEXT MONTH: The Romance of Actinium

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Mrs. Corter Makes Up Her Mind

By August W. Derleth

It was just a doll, but when it was given to a little girl who knew how to hate, a strange thing happened

BETWEEN bombs, as it were, Herbert Wrench thought he would pay a visit to the old girl who plied her wares under the sign of the Seven Stars, in Soho. She told fortunes, made prophecies, supplied all kinds of philtres, and generally lived on the superstition and imagination of her betters.

He could justify himself by pointing to the significance of the fact that though bombs had demolished buildings all around her, her place of business had not been hit. This may have been a coincidence, but Herbert Wrench could indulge himself.

After all, he had already gone to such ridiculous extremes to make up Winifred Corter's mind about him that enlisting the aid of someone who dabbled in the supernatural was almost superfluous as evidence to convince the casual observer of his fatuousness.

The fact was, Mrs. Corter was taking a most inconsiderate view of his attentions especially after the recent advent of Tim Bream, back from a hunt in Africa.

Winifred Corter was, frankly, too great a prize to risk losing. She had beauty, poise, money, position; true, she was not overly blessed with brains, but with his gifts in this direction, that flaw could easily be overlooked.

Moreover, there was that daughter of hers, just turned five, a perfect pest —petulant, spoiled, a whiner; she would be more difficult to take. Nevertheless, in view of all Winifred Corter's endowments, Herbert Wrench was prepared to make certain sacrifices, even to the extent of enduring little Jessie. Herbert Wrench belonged to Mayfair; in New York, he would have been a playboy, iron grey hair and all. But there was just a little iron grey hair, and Wrench was not above using coloring to rectify that.

He dressed impeccably, and on his income that was an achievement; moreover, he fancied himself a gentleman, and this delusion was a happy one, for he would certainly have done credit to Emily Post and all the other self-appointed arbiters of etiquette, without whom the world could have got along much easier.

He had got to that time of life when he wanted, figuratively speaking, someone to fetch his pipe and slippers for him; in short, when he looked over his shoulder, he saw his youth, which he

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"Don't!" cried Mrs. Corter. "Mustn't burn Mr. Wrench's gift!" But it was too late. In a downtown street Herbert Wrench writhed as an awful heat racked his body.

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had always supposed so close, surprisingly far behind him, and age just ahead of him, though he was still in his prime. So he cast about for a likely victim and saw Mrs. Winifred Corter, recently widowed, attractive in black, with soft brown eyes and a shy smile and altogether an air of bewilderment and sad acceptance of this world, trusting and faithful.

His pulse fluttered, he felt chills along his spine, his heart melted, and he thought: There she is. Gad, what a beauty! After holding her hand a while and looking into her eyes, he thought there could be no doubt of it; she was lost to his charm.

Everything had gone so well until Tim Bream came back. Now it developed that Bream had been an old friend of her husband's, more than half in love with her himself, and certainly not, judging by his actions, carrying a grudge against the Underground where the late Corter had met his untimely end. If Winifred Corter had announced any preference, he might gracefully have retired from the field.

But she had not; she had proved unexpectedly kittenish and coy; she professed a hopeless inability to make up her mind; she wanted, in short, to be pursued.

SO WRENCH pursued—with candy, flowers, gifts for little Jessie, the opera, and even an incredible presentation at court, which he had wangled from a Personage to whom he had once been of service. He went to ridiculous extremes, and yet Mrs. Corter could not make up her mind to which one of them she would ultimately turn to end her widowhood. It was time for stern measures, and Wrench took them. But these, too, were of no avail; she laughed at him; she thought he was joking, and made sport of his dignity as if she were just an overgrown girl. As a matter of record, she had given no evidence that she was more, but Wrench, concerned chiefly with the prize of her holdings, gave this no thought at all. Nevertheless, he was irritated, and he turned a more willing ear to the tales he heard about the power of Mari Twilling.

That was the old girl's name: Mari Twilling, like something out of a tuppence novel. So he went to see her, well bolstered by incredible tales of her curious power, and found her place easily enough. Cautiously, he had made an appointment, and she was waiting for him: a dumpy little woman with an harassed air, and a kind of nervousness, as if she were more anxious than he to get this "sitting," as she called it, over with. He was not impressed; his hope soured, but he sat down and outlined his troubles without giving any name to them.

Mari Twilling might have looked like a second-hand char-woman, but she had an immediate grasp of his problem. She pointed out at once that even if he succeeded in marrying his beloved Winifred, she would thereafter be unhappy because she had not chosen his rival; she was that kind of woman. So she was, he thought, staring into the beady little eyes the woman offered him. Therefore there was only one thing to do, Mrs. Twilling went on, and that was to get rid of Bream.

"But I hadn't meant to go that far," protested Wrench.

"Be practical. Think of your happiness," said Mrs. Twilling.

HE ADMITTED that Mari Twilling had a point, but it would have to be thought over. As an old soldier, he was not averse to death; not at all. It was the thought of murder. After all, the C. I. D. . . . He went on in this

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vein briefly under her vexed gaze.

"There wouldn't be a trace," she retorted. He would simply die one of the most natural deaths, nobody would be able to put a finger on the cause.

He showed a heightened interest. If there was certain to be no danger to him, of course, then perhaps . . . ?

Mrs. Twilling smiled engagingly and said that of course there would be no danger to him. "Thoughts are things, Mr. Wrench," she said, "and all you need is the power of thought. That is the principle of the voodoo death ouangas, of which you no doubt have heard." She brought one out: like an undersized doll, colorful, hairy, clearly a primitive.

Looking at it, he thought it would decorate his mantel; it was so *outré* that it was attractive.

"Of course, we have now progressed beyond these crude methods. This is merely a symbol to concentrate your thoughts upon. You see, it's no longer necessary to have a hank of hair or something; take this little ouanga along, and when the time comes that you can work yourself up to the proper degree of hatred, to the point of the death-wish, then throw it into the fire, and you won't be troubled by your rival again."

He shuddered.

"Oh, a nasty business, Mr. Wrench —but, as you like!" She shrugged.

"Well . . . ?"

"Why not take two of them? You may find a use for the other in time."

He could not resist a bargain; so he bought two of them. After he got outside, he thought with some regret of his purchase; the whole transaction had about it an air so prosaic that he could not possibly give any credence to it. Mrs. Twilling was a hoax, and the tales of her powers had unquestionably been grossly exaggerated, if not, indeed, created out of whole cloth by some over-imaginative mind for the purpose of creating a diversion. He put the two little ouangas into his pocket and carried them home.

WHENEVER Tim Bream came across his line of vision, or obtruded upon his plans for Winifred, Wrench thought of the ouangas. But, despite Jack Beading's assertion that Mari Twilling had given him some astoundingly correct information about the races, and Simon Maxwell's declaration that the old girl had accurately foretold certain changes in the market, and Esther Febril's statement that at least two deaths of which she had certain information had had their beginnings at that curiously unbombed address in Soho, Wrench did nothing about the ouangas but think of them.

However, he kept them, and thinking about them was stimulating, even if it led to nothing; there was always that tantalizingly remote possibility that there might be something to the rigmarole the old girl had handed him. And there was always the probability that some day Bream might irritate him to such an extent that he would be tempted to use one of the primitive dolls and so enlist Mrs. Twilling's services.

Above all, he was a little disappointed. He had really only wanted to make up Mrs. Corter's mind, and that had not been accomplished; she was as nice to Bream as she was to him, and Bream had the edge of a few years, with no iron grey hair. It was true, however, that if she married him, there was a strong chance that Winifred would regret her choice, especially if Bream got to be more famous, what with his explorations and all. And where would he be then? It might all be very inconvenient, for there was no

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telling what she might do in such a mood; he could never rid himself of the feeling that there was about her more than a little of the hoyden—and that, on top of her coyness, would be simply too much.

Things went along as usual. Bream and he shared Mrs. Corter's attention and time, and Mrs. Corter kept right on delaying about making up her mind, with that helpless air of hers, and saying how attractive they both were to her, and how much she would miss either one of them, and how she couldn't marry both of them, could she?

It was maddening, and it was noteworthy that even little Jessie was becoming depressed by Mrs. Corter's dillydallying, a fact which upset Wrench, because it was patent that, despite all the gifts he had given Jessie, Jessie definitely preferred Tim Bream, possibly because he had unceremoniously turned her over his knees one afternoon and spanked her. This was a hopeful sign for Jessie's future, but not reassuring to Wrench.

THE weeks lengthened into months, and finally Herbert Wrench's patience snapped. He had never in any event been a patient man, but he had held out remarkably well. It all came about over a misunderstanding; when he came, after a trying day during which nothing seemed to go well, to take Winifred to dinner and then to Covent Garden, he got there just in time to see her driving away with Tim Bream.

He had mistaken his date, but he did not think of that; he went straight home and, filled with hatred, took out one of the little ouangas and threw it into the fire, making his death wish and damning Tim Bream. Unfortunately, at the moment of his rash act, he saw the calendar and recognized his error in going for Winifred, and, a few seconds later, saw in the *News of the World* that Tim Bream was on the eve of setting out for South America, this time on official business, to counteract the effective propaganda of an enemy nation in those wilds.

Good God! what have I done! he thought, and tried to snatch the ouanga from the fire. But he was too late.

He spent an agonized night and could hardly wait to get hold of the next morning's paper to look for any hint of trouble to Tim Bream. But there was nothing. A picture of Tim Bream and "the attractive Mrs. Winifred Corter," making him green with envy, "come from the Savoy"—which was certainly well after the hour he had thrust the ouanga into the flames.

That Mari Twilling! The next time he heard her name mentioned he looked down his nose—he could do this very well—and maintained an air of great superiority.

TIM BREAM went off to South America and left the field to Wrench. That was gratifying, for Wrench was confident that he could help Mrs. Corter make up her mind without Bream around. He knew very well that there were cases in which absence makes the heart grow fonder, but Mrs. Corter was not one of them. He set about courting the widow with double his former assiduity, and, if Mrs. Corter knew what that portended, she was just as coy as ever and did not betray her knowledge. Besides, she had to face the fact that with Tim Bream away off in South America, she had to have something to do.

So now once more there was this constant round of parties, dinners, the opera, the theatre, weekends in the country, and sometimes, what with interruptions owing to defense measures, whole weeks there—a *menage a trois,*

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so to speak, for, of course, Jessie had to be taken along. Even Jessie seemed to show signs of softening toward Wrench, so that he began not unreasonably to see everything in its most favorable light.

Days passed, weeks passed, the war went on, Tim Bream remained in South America virtually incommunicado, and Winifred Corter grew more and more pliable: putty in Herbert Wrench's hands. And finally, one evening after a particularly fine time at the opera and after, when for the twentieth time or so Herbert Wrench gravely asked Winifred Corter to become his wife, she wriggled, smiled coyly and said yes.

Being a practical man, Wrench went about disposing of his things very methodically. Because of the war and this disgraceful and horrible business of bombers flying over London from time to time, killing people and ruining some buildings and all, they had decided to put off the wedding no longer than absolutely necessary to conform with conventional decency. Wrench arranged to terminate his lease, sold a little land he had in the country, and dispensed with some of his personal property, with one gratified eye on the house in Park Lane where he would soon be living with Winifred Corter. In going over his effects, he came upon the ouanga that woman, Mari Twilling, had given him; it still had an abstract appeal for him, and he was loath to throw it away; so he packed it up together with other odds and ends and took it over to Jessie.

SHE was fascinated by it; she had never seemed to care very much for dolls, but this curious and colorful thing took her fancy at once, and she was delighted to have it.

Wrench was gratified. He went back downstairs and suggested that Winifred, who had been reluctant to do so, might possibly seize upon this moment to tell Jessie she would soon have a new father. The time seemed too auspicious to miss, he thought with some amusement, remembering Mari Twilling and her rigmarole, thinking of the child, bright-eyed at the fireplace with the flames dancing upon her face, and the ouanga held up before her, grateful and appreciative.

He did a little shopping and took the Underground for home at Paddington. Three station from his own stop, he was seized suddenly with the most frightful burning pains; he stood up, ripped off his collar, tore down his shirt, screaming horribly, and collapsed.

Poor Herbert Wrench!

A doctor in the car examined him and pronounced him dead; so he was kept there for the eyes of a divisional inspector and the regular medical examiner, who looked him over very carefully indeed, and could find nothing whatever wrong about him, except of course that hideous smell of scorched flesh. But there was no sign of a burn on him, only the smell, and they could only assume that somehow he had passed through the odor and it had permeated his clothing. Since the autopsy likewise revealed nothing, the medical examiner put Herbert Wrench's untimely death down as due to heart failure, a wide field that covered a multitude of unknown deaths.

It was very puzzling, but the police had other matters to concern themselves about and forgot Herbert Wrench as soon as he was buried.

Not so Mari Twilling. She saw the notice of his death in the *Daily Express* and made some discreet inquiries. She reached Mrs. Corter's ear in good time and learned that Winifred's tragedy had been all the greater because

(Concluded on page 233)

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NATURE'S "FLUORESCENT" LIGHTS

By ROBERT WILLIAM CONANT

If the scientific knowledge of the insect were ours, the whole earth could be lit at night for a few dollars

WITHOUT a doubt one of the most remarkable advances made in the world of artificial lighting has been the fluorescent light that has come into extensive use during the last three years. These lights have spread into existence in stores, offices, factories, and homes with the speed of an unreined epidemic. Fluorescent lights give twice as much light for the same current used by an incandescent light and produce half the heat. The fluorescent light "spills" its light over a greater area, can be had in any number of different colors, and nearly duplicates daylight.

Strangely enough, however, scientists for years have known of the possibilities of fluorescent lighting—the fire-fly had given them the necessary clue. Over twenty years ago Professor S. P. Langley and Mr. F. W. Very spoke of the fire-fly as "the cheapest form of light". It was pointed out that nature produces light equal to that of a candle flame at about one four-hundreth of the cost in energy. As a matter of fact, if man could produce light as efficiently as nature, he could light a six room house and have current to spare for toasters and washing machines from the power supplied by four flashlight batteries.

The ordinary electric light is called an incandescent light because it gives off light rays as a direct result of high temperature. Watch a blacksmith heat a piece of iron and you'll get the idea. First the iron gets cherry red, then yellow-white, white and finally so dazzling that dark glasses are necessary to protect your eyes. Try watching a welding torch if you have any doubts.

Up until the advent of the fluorescent light, scientists depended entirely upon the incandescent light. They devoted their efforts mainly to finding high-temperature resisting materials for the filament. Such materials must stand high temperatures without melting and passing off into a vapor, leaving a black film in the bulb. But along with the high temperatures of the incandescent light there is also another waste: there is emitted at all times a large amount of infra-red and ultra violet waves. Although these waves can't be seen, they still give off light, and this is a waste of energy.

THIS explains why scientists became so interested in the fire-fly. This little bug produces light without heat with a mere fraction of the waste created by light coming from heat sources. Tests proved that a solution made from the mashed bodies of fire-flies would glow under ultra-violet light, and step one in the development of fluorescent light had been made. General Electric's George Inman made the lamp practical when he ground up a piece of willemite stone and sprayed the resulting willemite powder in an adhesive solution on the inside of a tube. The tube was then sealed at both ends and filled with mercury vapor. Current was sent through electric terminals placed at both ends of the tube and the first fluorescent light had been created.

As efficient as the fluorescent light is in comparison with the incandescent light, it still is not near as efficient as most of nature's "fluorescent" fish and insects. In fact, should man ever attain nature's full efficiency, he could have a continuous source of illumination by using the same fuel supply over and over again. He could light his six room house for about 50c a year.

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Cold light produced by bugs and fish is called luminescence. You're no doubt familiar with the nightly glow of radium paint on the hands of a watch, the phosphorescence of the sea, the faint glow of a phosphorous match, and how some crystals will glow when shaken. Such luminescences emit very little infra-red and ultra-violet light. Hence they are efficient even if faint.

The brightest luminescences are produced by living things. For instance, the light given off by damp wood in forests is caused by strands of luminous fungus growths in the wood. Dead fish cast upon the beach or kept in refrigerators often glow with a ghost-like greenishness. This is due to myriads of luminous bacteria living in the fish. You'd never be able to see the light from a single bacterium any more than you can see germs, but a colony of bacteria makes a vivid display.

Of the many forms of sea creatures that produce cold light, a small crustacean (hard shelled crab-like creature), known as *Cypridina,* about one-eighth of an inch long, is a perfect example of the production of animal light with the use of little or no measurable energy. If dried rapidly, this weird animal will again luminesce with a bright bluish glow whenever the dry material is moistened.

Unlike incandescent light, where a vacuum is essential for a bright glow, luminescence depends upon a plentiful supply of oxygen. In fact, no light will appear without this gas. Experiments have shown that luminescent creatures lose their brilliance as they are deprived of oxygen and scientists point out that this indicates a strange slow type of oxidation similar to the slow rust of iron.

Cypridina lives in the sea and secretes a phosphorescent fluid into the sea water whenever disturbed. Dr. E. Newton Harvey, professor of physiology, Princeton, has found that the temperature of this fluid is less than one one-thousandth of a degree greater than that of the surrounding water. Since all forms of oxidation result in temperature changes, you can readily realize just how slow this process is. Whenever thousands of these tiny creatures shoot their liquid light into the water en masse, enough light is created to enable one to read a newspaper.

FURTHER proof that the light given off by luminescent insects is sufficient to serve as illumination for man is borne out by the fact that the ancient Greeks used to light their way with fire-fly lanterns. These lanterns consisted of cages filled with fireflies. You might say that the Greeks were the first to introduce "fluorescent" light.

The most important factor concerning animal light is its amazing regeneration facilities. Second in importance is its chemical nature. The light-producing liquid contains a substance called luciferin, which is oxidized in the presence of an enzyme, a chemical compound of animal origin, called luciferase also contained in the glowing secretion. An exacting analysis of these substances has revealed they are carbon compounds.

However, it is in the amazing regenerative powers of animal light that the science looks forward to an almost limitless future in illumination. When coal burns, gases are formed which cannot directly be recombined to reform coal. That reaction was carried out eons ago, when plants of the coal age stored up food material under the energy producing influence of sunlight. Now, when we burn coal we're really using just so much sunlight that has been in "cold storage" for eons.

But when luciferin burns, it leaves no gases; only slight oxidation takes place. Furthermore, the oxidation product, oxyluciferin, can be converted back into luciferin again; and once reconverted it is used over again to produce more light. In other words insects like the fire-fly are continously oxidizing and reducing luciferin to produce light. No measurable amount of energy is added to the original luciferin and none is taken away. It is probably the closest thing to perpetual motion that man has ever recorded. In all likelihood some energy is used, but science has yet to measure it.

Lighting engineers feel that fluorescent lighting is only the first step in the direction of better illumination for all of us. These scientists envision the day when rooms will be flooded with light coming from luminous paint. Wires will be ancient history and your light bill will consist of an occasional coat of paint.

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Somewhere over there Joan of Arc rides again!

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Return of Joan of Arc

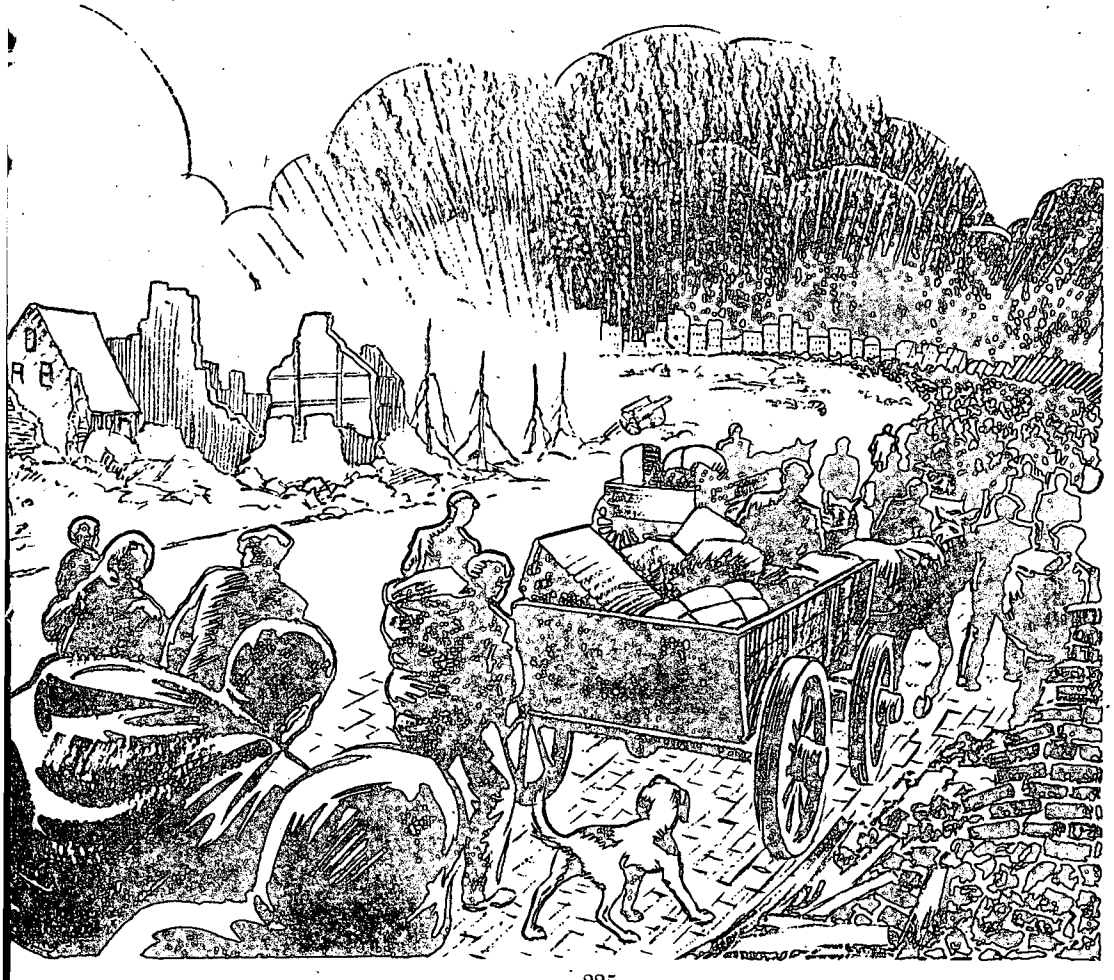
By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

Sue Heyvard played Joan of Arc so well that a strange thing happened. The role became real!

ON the frosted glass door of my office there is a sign.

Tad Barrow—Theatrical Producer.

It has been there for twenty-five years, and like myself it holds its age very well considering everything. The paint is a trifle scarred, of course, but I've never bothered to have the lettering done over. Noel Coward has looked at that lettering. So have Bea Lillie, Will Rogers, Eddie Wynn, John Barrymore, Gene O'Neil, Ben Hecht, DeWolfe Hopper—just to give you an idea. The scarred black letters are good enough for the punks of today.



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I've seen them all, big and little, ham and genius, and people in bars and at parties are always getting me off into a corner to ask me who, in my opinion, is the greatest actress ever to stand behind the footlights.

Sometimes, when my stomach is acting up and I feel surly, I ask them how in the hell should I know? After all, I have seen the very greatest, and it would be impossible to pick one in particular from such a staggering array of talen past and present.

But other times, when the Martinis are taking a nice effect, and I find myself imbued with a lush and rosy glow, I lean over and whisper, with complete truthfulness:

"Susan Heyvard."

"Susan Heyvard?" is the general reply. "I, ah, don't think I remember her clearly. What did she last appear in?"

And then I remind them that her one starring appearance was in the lead of one of my productions about a year and a half ago, and that until that time she had played only secondary roles.

"Oh, yes," I am then told doubtfully. "I think I do recall Susan Heyvard. She got rather nice reviews in that production of yours, didn't she? What happened to her after that? Didn't she get married or something?"

I feel, sometimes, like reminding my questioner that Sue Heyvard's reviews in my lasts how were nothing short of terrific. But she only had one lead, and that's the way the public memory is. If she'd stayed on—

But she didn't stay on, and even though the public will recall her name with difficulty, I am one person who will never forget Susan Heyvard. Or the day she first stepped through the frosted glass door bearing my name in scarred black point . . .

IT WAS in the summer of 1937. The day was dusty and sweltering. I had just finished casting on a new show I was going to produce for Toby Evans. Melvin Gardner had written the script, and it was a corker. Of course you remember it. *House of Chaos*, was the title.

Maybe I felt irritable. Maybe it was the heat. Broadway in mid-July is hell. Or maybe it was my stomach. At any rate, when Sue Heyvard stepped timidly through the door and stood there desolately in my deserted outer office, peeking in at me where I sat, I was annoyed.

"Well?" I snapped. "What is it?"

Sue Heyvard was wearing a frayed black serge suit—in the middle of July, mind you—and a worn black felt hat. Her nose was red and her face shone with perspiration. She had long black hair that fell stringily to her shoulders, framing a pinched, pale, most pathetically eager face.

She had brown eyes. The brownest, widest, most incredibly alive eyes I have ever seen. They were filled with fright, and utter weariness, and the damnedest determination you've ever seen.

"You . . . you are Mr. Barrow?" she stammered faintly.

"I am Tad Barrow," I admitted sourly. "And if you've a piece to speak, I'm sure both of us would be saved a lot of shouting if you'd step into my inner office here."

She came into my office, still wearing that curious mixture of timidity and determination. Standing in the outer office she'd looked like hell. Now, less than three feet from me, she looked worse than that.

"Well?" I demanded.

"I heard you are casting for a new production," she said. I noticed for the first time that her voice, in spite of its

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fright, was low, cool, surprisingly close to being beautiful.

I sighed.

"I have completed casting" I said.

"But, I—" she began.

"I sent out notices," I said, "giving the time and date of my casting. If you didn't get them straight and consequently walked in here after it was all over, you can't expect me to do anything about that."

Sue was twisting worn white gloves miserably in her thin hands. Those hands were very red, as if from a lot of dishwater, restaurant variety, and when she saw my eyes fixed on them she quickly put them behind her back.

"I'm sorry," I said a little bit more kindly.

She half opened her month, as if to say something, then shut it tight. I found out from her later that she'd been late because of her inability to get away from the restaurant where she was soaping dishes for the first square meals she'd had in weeks.

"That's all right," she said, forcing a tight little smile. Her wide brown eyes were suddenly watery, and naked discouragement shone behind their mist.

"What experience have you had?" I asked, then added quickly, "I might as well know for future reference." Sometimes just a few words like that gave them encouragement enough to try again.

But she sensed that I was merely giving her a straw for courage, and the discouragement didn't leave.

"None," she said softly. "I haven't had any real experience."

HOW often have I heard that phrase from poor kids like her? I sighed, and tried to think of some way to tell her to go back to wherever she came from.

"I know what you're thinking," she said wearily. "But I can act, I know it!"

I shook my head.

"Not even community theater work, or school plays?" I asked. Most of them had at least those standard pegs on which to hang their convictions about their ability.

"No," she said. "But I know I can act!"

I looked at her carefully, at the clothes, and the gloves, and the cheap little hat and the dishwater hands, and I knew this was the same old story. A burning conviction, based on nothing but wild dreams. Scrimping and saving to come to Broadway to have a try. Bitter disillusionment, scant funds evaporating, finally a search for any kind of work to keep food in the stomach, hope in the heart.

I sighed again.

She interpreted that sigh correctly and turned to leave. My telephone rang at that moment. Marty Silvers, the agent, was on the other end.

"Tad, the kid you signed to play the maid this afternoon wants a release. She's gotten a chance to take a lead in a summer stock troupe. Will you release her?"

"Sure, can you get me another, Marty?"

I looked up from the telephone for an instant. Sue Heyvard was in the outer office, walking to the door. Something happened to my usually cold judgment.

"Wait a minute, Marty," I said.

"Hey," I called after her, "Hey you, come back!"

Sue Heyvard, startled, knees a-tremble, turned and came back. She seemed to be holding her breath and her eyes were half closed.

"Never mind, Marty," I said. "I've got a kid now who'll fit the part."

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I hung up and looked at her.

"Think you can handle a walk-on bit with about twelve lines as a maid, a servant, in my new show?" I growled.

"Oh, Mr. Barrow," she said. "Oh, Mr. Barrow. Oh, Mr. Barrow!" And then the tears, which never would have been shed in defeat, came forth unchecked to greet her first triumph. . . .

HOUSE OF CHAOS opened in August and was a smash hit. Sue Heyvard was drawing down twenty dollars a week as the maid. I don't believe any actress ever concentrated more on twelve lines than she did. The play was so generously received that Hollywood was on the wire long distance the morning after the opening, wanting to buy it and to have Toby Evans play the lead in the picture whenever our run was finished.

One critic said: *"Every person in the cast, including the pinch-featured little gamin who plays the maid, is unbelievably real."*

It was the first review Sue Heyvard got. It thrilled her to the bottom of her shoes, even though her name wasn't mentioned, and the description of her was not exactly flattering.

"You know, Tad," Toby Evans, who had the lead, said once, "that thin-faced little Heyvard girl believes the entire play is real, and that she actually is the maid. Honestly, when I see her offstage, I sometimes forget myself to the extent of asking her to fix up a tray of cocktails!"

Which was the truth. Sue seemed almost in a trance during the entire run. Even offstage she acted like the maid she was supposed to be in the show. She was literally living her tiny role, polishing it day after day, as if it were tremendously important, vitally essential, that she *be* the maid.

House of Chaos, after the holiday run ended in January, went on the road. I was getting a new production ready in the meantime. And for some reason I kept Sue Heyvard behind in New York to take a fairly minor role in it.

Sue got the part of a snobbish sister of a debutante in the new production. The play, which had but a minor success, was, *The Money Mummies.* I don't blame you if you don't recall it. With many more than a dozen lines, this time, and drawing down the huge sum of thirty-five bucks a week for her efforts, Sue walked away with the majority of plaudits in the first night reviews of, *The Money Mummies.*

"Sue Heyvard, in the relatively unimportant role of Glenda, snobbish sister of the heroine," wrote Burns Mantle, *"is so convincingly irritating you want to wait at the stage door when the play is over to slap her snooty map. Her work is the high point in a run-of-the-mill production."*

The show lasted a two months run before it closed. And it was just as well for Sue that it closed so soon. The entire cast would have cheerfully broken her neck by the end of that time. For she insisted on living her unpleasant character assignment off the stage as well as on. In short, for two months, Sue Heyvard was actually the damnedest snob I have ever encountered.

"Really, Tad," Sue replied when I hinted she wasn't endearing herself to the cast at the end of a month, "they're such a stupid, boring lot of cattle!"

I had almost exploded. Then I'd noticed the almost glazed expression in her eyes, and got my first inkling as to what a hell of a great actress Sue Heyvard was turning into. So I kept my mouth shut until the show closed. And sure enough, Sue was herself again after the last curtain on *The Money Mummies.*

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THAT was at the start of the summer of 1938. One year later. So you can see how far Sue had traveled in that mere year, when I tell you that I was willing to take a chance on her ability to carry a strong supporting part in my next production, a thing called, *This Thy Morning*, which was a terrific script around the struggle of the southern poor whites against labor enslavement.

We opened on Broadway in September. Maybe it was the fact that hell broke loose in Europe that month and year, or maybe it was because plays with a social message too often are ignored. At any rate, we closed three months later, lucky to break even and meet expenses on the play.

Sue Heyvard, at seventy-five dollars a week, had the role of a young school teacher who fights against tremendous odds to better the miserable working conditions of the people in her dirt poor community. As I said, it was a supporting part, but it was strong. So strong that Sue, with the magnificent portrayal she turned in, made every critic in New York sit up and take notice. There were no reviews of her work that didn't drool plaudits for her performance.

But I don't think Sue paid particular attention to the applause this time. For once again she was utterly wrapped up in her role. That's right, offstage as well as on.

When newspapermen spotted her in a picket line before a garment factory in Jersey, the wise birds screamed that it was a none-too-original publicity stunt to draw attention to the show.

But I was in charge of the publicity, and it was no idea of mine. And when I talked to Sue about it, she had that glazed, in-another-world expression on her face, and she couldn't seem to comprehend what I was driving at. I knew it hadn't been her idea to get some newsprint for herself. She just wasn't the sort.

Her social fervor, so help me, was nothing but the result of her utter transformation into the character she was portraying before the footlights every evening.

By the time *"This Thy Morning,"* had closed, Sue had received four offers to take Hollywood screen tests. As incredible as it seemed to me, people were saying that her pinched, eager little face with that long straight black hair and those wonderfully wide and vital brown eyes gave her striking beauty!

People were saying it so often I was beginning to realize they were right. It didn't strike you until you'd seen her a while. Taken separately, all Sue's facial characteristics were odd and unattractive; but together they combined to give her a rich, warm, vital, human beauty that was undeniable.

OF COURSE, when *This Thy Morning* closed, Sue was once again herself. On my advice, she held off on the screen test offers, and turned down bids to go into several other productions which I didn't figure would advance her any.

"You're set for star billing in your next show, Sue," I told her. "And the minute I hear of a vehicle that suits you, it's yours, at three hundred a week."

Her wide brown eyes went even wider at this, and she smiled in that peculiar, heart-warming, unaffected way she had.

"Gosh, Tad, that sounds really wonderful. Of course, I won't do anything you'd advise me against," she said.

"Swell," I said, and added jokingly, "because I'd hate to think of your taking the role of a murderess, for example,

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with the way you hurl yourself into a characterization. Why, I bet you'd bump off half the population of New York before the play's run was over."

Sue smiled, and then her expression became serious.

"You know, Tad," she declared earnestly, "I imagine a lot of people think I affect a dreadfully 'ham' pose during a run. But honestly, I don't quite know what does happen to me when I take a new role. Perhaps I go a little overboard mentally, but I seem to feel almost as if someone else, the character I'm trying to be, takes complete control of me. I don't know if I could do anything about it if I tried."

From any other actress in the world, I wouldn't have accepted that explanation as anything but temperamental guff, the sort of stuff you read in the frowziest press releases in the screen mags. But I had seen Sue, and I knew her. It was strictly on the level. The kid wasn't suggesting publicity releases. . . . .

FOR the rest of the winter season I searched for possible plays in which to feature Sue. But I was being very particular, wanting to give the kid the benefit of a smash script in her first starring role, and nothing seemed quite good enough.

But in March, Melvin Gardner—who, ironically enough, had authored the first show in which Sue had the bit part of a maid—sent in a play he'd finished on his Maryland farm after three months' intensive work.

It was a spine-thrilling historical piece. It had a third act that some day will be preserved to be compared with the best that Shakespeare ever did. And it was tailor-made to Sue Heyvard.

I called in Sue immediately.

"Can you speak French?" I kidded her.

"Why, no, of course not, Tad" she said puzzled.

Then I dropped the kidding.

"You don't have to," I laughed, "so don't look so worried. But I've found the script for you. And you are going to play a French girl."

"A French girl?"

"A very celebrated French girl," I said. I pulled the manuscript of the play from my desk. "A damsel history refers to as Joan of Arc. You are to be Joan. The play is based around the most dramatic peak of her life. Here, read me Joan's part in the last scene of the third act."

Sue found the scene and started, hesitantly, to read her lines. She caught the swing, the rhythmic drama, inside of a few sentences.

We were in a paper littered theatrical office. It was a bright spring New York afternoon. But I forgot everything, absolutely everything, while I listened to that girl read. I got a lump in my throat and there were tears in my eyes, while my spine was gooseflesh. God, how she filled that role!

And three months later, in the Fall of '39, I stood in the wings of the packed Broadway opening night of *Joan For Freedom,* listening to the thunderous applause roll deafeningly across the footlights as the audience called again, and again, and again for for Sue Heyvarth, as Joan of Arc, to take curtain bows. Even the stage hands and electricians had choked throats and watery eyes, and none of them ashamed of it.

Joan For Freedom was sold out six months in advance at the box office. You had to see your Senator to get a ticket. And night after night, Sue, as Joan of Arc, knelt before a hushed and tensed audience and delivered her heart-tearing plea for France. It was acting that occurs once in a hundred years of theater, occurring every night.

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The lines were terrific, there was no doubt of that. They'd have been splendid delivered by practically any actress. But what Sue added to them was incredible.

AND as the first few months went by, it became alarmingly apparent that the role was taking as much from Sue as she was putting into it. For she was Joan, offstage as well as on. And the deep, burning intensity of her portrayal was so genuine it was frightening.

I was worried. I didn't want the kid torn into a nervous breakdown. I tried to talk to her, tried to break through the wall she'd built around her. The wall that was the very heart and soul of Joan of Paris.

It was little use, however, for she had never been more deeply buried in a role. The best I could do was to see that she was kept under careful supervision while she was offstage, and make certain that her health was watched carefully. This scheme seemed to work satisfactorily for the first nine months of the run.

But it was shortly after that my fears became facts. My warning came in the form of a telephone call from Sue's maid. I had told her to get in touch with me the instant anything out of the way happened in regard to her mistress.

"Miss Heyvard left her apartment half an hour ago in a more than usually strange emotional state," the maid said almost weepingly. "I told the chauffeur to call me the moment he took her where she wanted to go, Mr. Barrow," the excited servant declared. "He just called to say he dropped her off at a tiny French church. He's waiting outside for her, but he says she seems in a trance and spoke to him in what he believes is French!"

Hastily, I got the address from the bewildered woman and was in a cab a few minutes later, speeding to that church. Over and over in my mind was running the fact that Sue, according to this, had been speaking to her chauffeur in a language about which she knew absolutely nothing. It was impossible. Perhaps the chauffeur had let his imagination run wild on him. Undoubtedly the kid had cracked, and had more than likely been delirious.

I was frantic when I climbed out of the cab in front of the tiny French church. Sue's limousine was parked just ahead of me, and the chauffeur stood at the curb, nervously smoking a cigarette.

"She's inside, Mr. Barrow," he said excitedly.

I went up the steps of the church at a most irreverent pace. At the door I stopped. The tiny little place of worship was deserted save for Sue.

She knelt in a pew near the back. Her face was more intensely beautiful than I had ever seen it. Tears rolled down her cheeks. Her lips were moving slowly.

I went up quietly beside her, but she seemed not to notice me. Her voice was coming in a half whisper. The words she spoke were *in French*.

"Sue," I said gently, touching her arm.

Her lips continued to move. She seemed oblivious of my presence. My knowledge of French is extremely sketchy. But I was aware of one thing about the words she spoke instantly. They were the lines of the dramatic final scene from the play, spoken in the tongue of the original Joan of Paris!

"Sue," I said. This time I put my hand on her arm. Unprotesting, she rose. In the look she gave me there was no recognition. I helped her from the church. Outside, I gave her chauf-

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feur the address of the best hospital in New York. . . .

"A breakdown, of course," the doctors told me two hours later. "Miss Heyvard will need rest, lots of it. But we would advise you to leave her under our observation for the next several days."

When I was finally assured that I could be of no further help, I left, cursing myself for a stupid slave-driving swine. I should have kept Sue under more careful scrutiny. I might have prevented this.

I'LL never forget the frantic afternoon I spent readying Sue's understudy for the role of Joan. The show had to go on, even without its great actress.

That was not only a staggering day for me, but also a tragic day for the world itself. History will remember it as the day that France fell beneath the crushing boots of Germany. I remember that I was vaguely aware of the headlines screaming this as I finally started back across town to the hospital where Sue was.

But by the time I arrived at the hospital, *Sue was gone!*

I shall never forget the horror and sickening self-accusation I suffered. Or the astonished, frantic protestations of the doctors that they had put her under hypodermics and that it wouldn't have been possible for her to slip from her bed and from the hospital.

But she was gone, and there was no doubt of that. And her clothes were gone from the closet of her room.

Frantically, haggardly, I spent the next hours, the next days, the next weeks in search for Sue Heyvard. I kept the story of her disappearance from the papers, even though I was forced to release the admission that she'd suffered a nervous breakdown.

The police could find no trace. I put the best private detective agency in town on the case. They, too, were helpless. There was only one shred of evidence gathered that pointed even vaguely to her trail. And that was presented by a longshoreman who'd been one of a crew unloading a tramp steamer flying a French flag at the cargo docks the afternoon of Sue's disappearance.

"Yes," said the longshoreman, after being shown nine or ten photographs of Sie Heyvard, "I think that might be the girl I seen go aboard the French ship late in the afternoon, shortly before it sailed."

"You didn't see her leave the ship?" he was asked.

"I was around the rest of the day. I didn't see her come off the ship once she went aboard."

Shipping authorities knew a little about that French cargo ship, but not as much as you might expect. Yes, it was a French ship. It's captain undoubtedly decided, on hearing what had happened to his government that day, to leave New York before his craft could be seized to be held for the duration.

No, the French ship carried no wireless. It's destination was suggested as a port in what was soon to become Occupied France.

Those who knew of Sue's tragic disappearance said I was mad to think that she was aboard that vessel. But I had checked her bank, and she'd taken a large amount of cash from it late in the afternoon of her appearance. A cargo captain could be persuaded to close his eyes to an extra passenger without a passport, for enough cash.

Of course you know Sue was never found. I called off the search shortly after that, knowing deep inside me that I'd seen her for the last time in, well, in a long, long time to come. . . .

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THERE was only one person to whom I told this story. He gave it more than sympathetic attention. He was Doctor Stephan Zeider, the eminent Dutch psychologist. He made me repeat the story of Sue Heyvard again and again, as if he were committing every last detail to memory.

Then he closed his eyes, made a profound steeple of his fingers and confirmed my growing conviction.

"Of course," he declared, "there is no doubt but what she is Joan of Arc. The human mind is capable of many mysterious things, friend Barrow. Its powers have never been fully explored. The girl spoke French in that tiny church, and yet she knew not a word of it, actually. But it was the tongue of Joan, and she was Joan, crying for the people of France, vowing vengeance for her beloved people, just as Joan did centuries before her."

At my elbow as I write this, I have a late copy of a national weekly magazine. Its dateline shows that it came from the press some sixteen to eighteen months after Sue Heyvard disappeared. Featured as the lead story of this magazine is an article dealing with the growing and tremendous forces of revolt and unrest in the countries of Occupied Europe. A small part of the article has come to my attention. I'll pass it on to you as I have passed on the rest of the evidence.

And though the governments of these conquered nations have been carefully weeded of dangerous leaders, in the ranks of the underground revolt, new leaders have arisen. Among these new leaders none is so romantically appealing as the pinch-faced, yet beautiful Parisian girl they call Joan D'Arc.

It is this mysterious Joan who has organized the terrifying system of revenge and harassment of the Nazi forces of occupation. None know her origin, none care. She appeared in the darkest hour of France, like another Joan, centuries before her. They say the price placed on her head by the Gestapo is the highest in France. We are inclined to believe it.

And so it is that I know the chances of my ever seeing Sue again are slim. But I think often about those wide brown incredibly vital eyes belonging to Sue Heyvard, the girl who is Joan. And sometimes I pray that the curtain will finally fall on her greatest role.

And then Sue Heyvard will return, and perhaps Broadway will again applaud the most incredibly real actress I have ever seen behind the footlights.

For, to repeat, I've seen them all.

MRS. CORTER MAKES UP HER MIND

(Concluded from page 221)

Wrench had just left her home, and she had gone upstairs to tell her daughter, breaking the news to her very gently and slowly, because she was an excitable little girl. And Jessie had become excited; she had become so furiously angry that she had thrown into the fire a little doll Wrench had just given her.

"How she must have hated him!" said Mari Twilling.

"Not my little girl!" protested Mrs. Corter indignantly.

Mari Twilling smiled and said nothing. She made some obscure notes in her record book about additional evidence of the power of thought, and kept on plying her curious wares in the unbombed house in Soho.

As for Mrs. Corter, after weeping a great deal, she had to go to the trouble of making up her mind all over again. But when Tim Bream came back, it was not difficult at all.

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READER'S PAGE

POOR HARRY SCHUSTER!

Sirs:

Like a certain apparently (ahem!—Ed.) student named Harry Schuster, I have been an ardent fan for quite a number of years, and during those years I have read many "grouch letters" dealing with many different pet hates. In all this time I have sat back and let somebody else write to "dear ed" and bawl out the grouchers. But now someone who does not like to see a picture of a darned nice-shaped dame on the cover of a magazine has stirred my inner self and aroused me to the point of this letter.

So, withering scorn and rightful indignation prompt me to cast my vote for the continuance of that contribution, the "Mac Girl" which McCauley has made, and to ask Harry Schuster to step outside a moment.

If Schuster doesn't like the covers of F.A. let him tear them off and send them to me. I'll pay postage. And if asking you to keep on printing the "Mac Girl" makes me a hypocrite, I'm *darned glad* to be one!

This Schuster neck which Harry so kindly stuck out is going to be stepped on by more than one "Mac Girl" fan, but if you don't print this letter, please send it to Schuster anyway. I'd like him to know how I feel about his "disgusting" Mac Girl covers!

Phil Taliaferro,
218 North Street,
Portsmouth, Virginia.

Before we comment on this subject, we'll present just one more letter.—Ed.

AMERICAN MORALS

Sirs:

I read Mr. Schuster's letter in the reader's page about the Mac Girl and I'm glad to say that I disagree with him. It is natural for the normal male to admire the feminine figure. It will be a great thing when they kick this g-string stuff in all the printed filth off the market. That kind of trash undermines American morals. But why clamp down on the Mac Girl? McCauley doesn't draw her in suggestive poses. She always has seemed to me to be the typical American girl. And another thing, don't ever have him draw her in rags. Either fully clothed or nothing. Complete nudity is better than tickling the imagination with rags to hide the details.

This letter will get a great deal of criticism, but nudity, like anything else, loses its novelty when the secrecy is stripped from it. This cannot be accomplished in this day and age because mankind is not yet mature. Not for a long time will the human race shake off vice. But FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, I think, is doing a great service by printing the Mac Girl and helping to eliminate secrecy and vice and giving man a little more dignity.

Carl Group,
(address not given).

If we were to print all the letters we received in support of our lovely Mac Girl, and in exactly the reverse of Mr. Schuster, we'd have no room for stories. Naturally, no one has said anything about Mr. Schuster personally, but he certainly brought out a storm of "opinion" which ranks on an equal footing with his own opinion, which we as Americans will die to defend his right to have.

However, as editors, we now have no doubt but what our readers want more Mac Girls. And they shall get exactly what they want—more beautiful and adorable than ever!

Your letter, Mr. Group, won't get much criticism. You've stated the matter very clearly and truthfully. Our Mac Girl is lovely, she's American, every inch of her, and she's the kind of a girl who'd be a real pal to Mr. America.

But we do think that our readers needn't look to the far future to "shake off vice." They are pretty level-headed and fine-moral people right now!

As for beauty, who can deny that it is a better way to good character than ugliness?—Ed.

ENJOYS READER'S PAGE

Sirs:

I enjoy your reader's page as much as any story, and I am grateful for a chance to add my contribution.

"Doorway to Hell" was a great story—thus far—but did you notice the difference in the cover and inside pictures? Mr. Fuqua didn't make the doors part at the same place, or between the same words.

Several times readers have spoken of fantasy as science fiction with the science left unexplained. I don't like that definition. Fantasy is the product of a super imagination—pipe dream, if you will—picturing weird ideas in beautiful adventure, and in strange and at present unknown circumstances. So much for fantasy.

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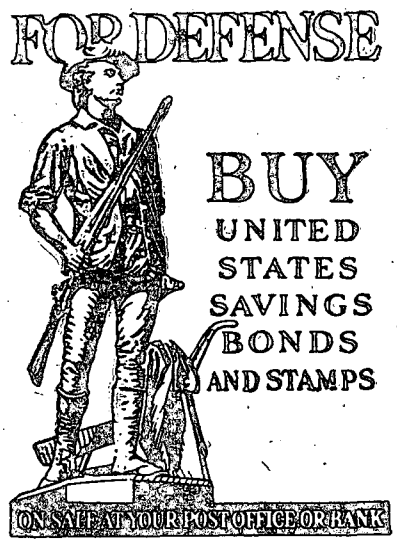

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About W. C. Fagot's letter, I would like to say a word. Does your sister magazine, *Amazing Stories* stipulate that stories have to be science fiction? The title says it's "amazing" stories, and that is a mild word for any of Burroughs' stories. However, I think he will find not a little science fiction in Burroughs' stories.

Morris A. Bail,
Eagle Bend, Minn.

Your definition of fantasy is as good as any we've seen so far. We hope our authors see it and turn out some of those "pipe dreams!"

No, Amazing Stories *does not stipulate that all stories be "science" fiction. We run many an off-trail story in that magazine that has no science in it at all. The title "amazing" covers more than just science.—Ed.*

THIS IS LOYALTY!

Sirs:

A month ago I lost an eye in an accident. Shortly afterward I got my copy of F.A. If you think it's easy to read with one eye, when you are used to two, just try it sometime. However, I couldn't leave the book alone, and with long rests between chapters and pages, I finally read it through. I wonder if Milt Lesser would have done that?

If he doesn't like fantasy, why doesn't he buy a "two-gun shoot 'em down" western? You know, there is such a thing as your department being too friendly.

F.A. and A.S. are two out of three of the best fantastic magazines on the market. All the stories aren't masterpieces, but I'm willing to take the bad with the good. Burroughs is best, of course, but I'll vouch for Cabot, O'Brien, Wilcox; and Williams is good sometimes. I like St. John the best for pics. Jackson and Ruth make pretty faces, and they aren't so bad on figures if they do 'em nude. But look at some of those dressed-up dolls. There surely is room for nothing but skin and bones in those pants legs and sleeves. We usually like to see a husky he man as the hero of our stories. And don't take it to heart about clothing the Mac Girls. I like them just as they are.

Morris A. Bail,
Eagle Bend, Minn.

We're extremely sorry to hear of the accident to your eye. And we thank you for writing not only one, but two letters. We'll keep on trying to please you, and we'll give that matter of he men and she women a little serious thought Let us know when you see improvement.—Ed.

UNDERGOING A CHANGE

Sirs:

Both FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and *Amazing Stories* have been undergoing a notable change during the last six to eight months. Whether that change has been for the better or not is a matter of opinion; but that a change has taken place, it would be hard to deny. I think it is for the better.

In FANTASTIC ADVENTURES the change has been gradual. "Three Eyes in the Dark" was an indication of things to come. I recall with pleasure such stories as "The Perfect Hideout," "The Truthful Liar," "The Reformation of Joseph Reed," "Mr. Murchison's Ghost," and, in 1942, "The Tenant on the Thirteenth Floor," and "Fate and the Fly."

It is noteworthy that several of these stories require considerably more than mere passive reception from the reader. Far too many stories in your magazines have required anything except the ability to follow the action.

D. B. Thompson,
1903 Polk,
Alexandria, La.

Whenever we get a good *story of the type you like, we run it. Because we know that everyone likes to think and ponder and wonder at times. But these stories must necessarily be in the minority, because it is a basic requirement that we entertain you. If you've noticed any improvement, it's because many more excellent fantasy stories were written, and are now being written, than there were in earlier years. We've tried hard to educate our writers to the ability to turn out a wide variety of material, so that they do not become hackneyed. You say we've succeeded.—Ed.*

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A SMEARED MASTERPIECE

Sirs:

Why did you let McCauley smear up the masterpiece by Robert Fuqua, depicting a scene from "Doorway to Hell?" For my money, she should have passed through the door before she stopped to look at the demon. Probably the demon was the only one looking at her anyhow. Yes, I mean the Mac Girl. I've seen better specimens in class 4-F. Take the honey on the cover of *Amazing Stories* depicting "Kidnaped Into the Future." There was a girl! Also the one for "The Earthquake Girl." Those are real beautiful girls. McCauley, please note.

I have no other complaint to make about your mag. It is simply swell, and I have never read better fantasy than the material you have been giving us.

Is Virgil Finlay related to Magarian? Those two can draw exactly alike.

Rating for the March issue:

1. "Doorway to Hell"; congrats to Patton for a superb story.

2. "War on Venus"; Burroughs at his best.

3. "The Electrical Butterflies"; Rocklynne is grand.

4. "Later Than You Think"; I've seen Kuttner do better.

5. "Afraid to Live"; Farnsworth should write a novel.

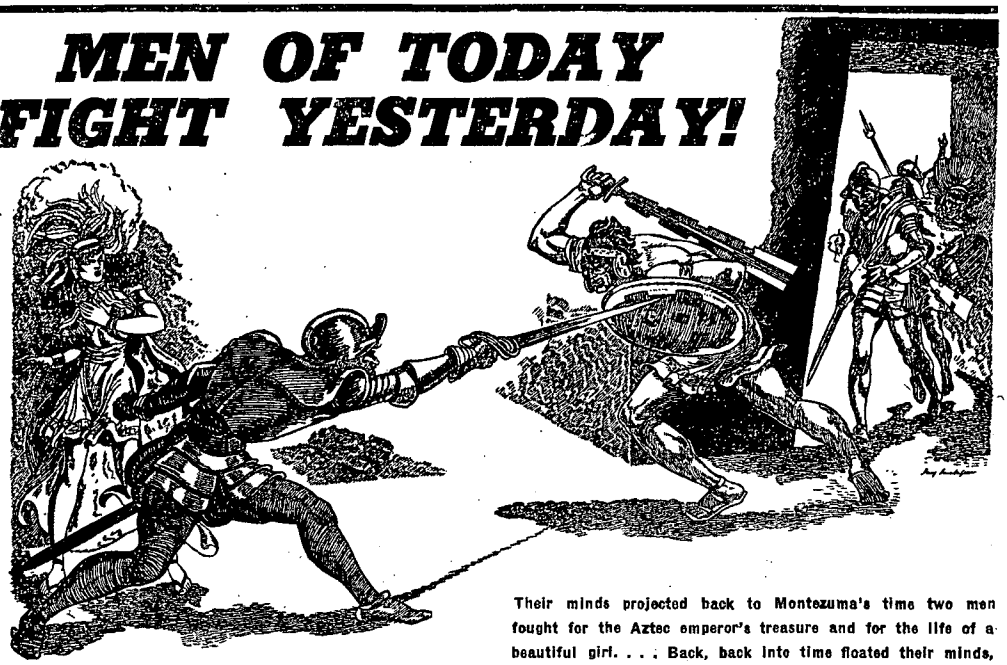
6. "The Fantastic Twins"; Cabot is in a slump.

Please don't have any more Mac Girls like the last one. My girl friend Georgia has her all beat to pulp.

Arthur Mareth,
118 E. 21st Street,
Chicago, Illinois.

McCauley can trump your ace. You see, he painted the Earthquake Girl. She is a Mac Girl! And we might add (aside) that you are wrong as to the identity of the Mac Girl. She has been posed for by many young ladies. A different one each time. No, Finlay and Magarian aren't related. Personally, we are intrigued by your mention of Georgia's charms. Maybe we can get her to pose for a Mac Girl cover, eh?—Ed.

MEN OF TODAY FIGHT YESTERDAY!



JUNE ISSUE

fantastic ADVENTURES

Their minds projected back to Montezuma's time two men fought for the Aztec emperor's treasure and for the life of a beautiful girl. . . . Back, back into time floated their minds, capturing minds and bodies of two men of yesteryear. One, the doughty Lopez, captain under Cortez. The other, the crafty Guatemozin, nephew of the emperor. . . . Thus, Nick Clark shared the phenomenal experience of participating in the Aztec wars, of seeing the world of 400-odd years ago with his own eyes, of daring his all for science, the girl he loved and Montezuma's fabulous treasure. . . . It's his "Quest in Time" by Edmond Hamilton, one of the many brilliant pieces of fantasy and science-fiction in the June issue.

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1941'S BEST

Sirs:

In my opinion, the following are your best 20 stories in 1941:

1. The Liquid Man (September).
2. The Earthquake Girl (October).
3. Onslaught of the Druid Girls (June).
4. The Return of Circe (August).
5. Death Plays a Game (December).
6. The Masterful Mind of Mortimer Meek (May).
7. The Horse that Talked (January).
8. The Dynamouse (January).
9. Death Walks in Washington (March). Oscar Saves the Union (September).
10. Al Addin and the Infra Red Lamp (November).
11. Slaves of the Fishmen (March).
12. Goddess of Fire (July).
13. The Living Dead (November).
14. The Floating Robot (January).
15. Secret of the Stone Doll (March).
16. Land of the Shadow Dragons (May).
17. Thunder Over Washington (October).
18. Eight Who Came Back (November).
19. The Man Who Bought Mars (June).
20. City of Lost Souls (July).

William P. McGivern's humor is the best type of fantasy I have ever read. His characters are so real, I sometimes wonder. I don't see how you can degrade an author as great as McGivern to give this Burroughs the title of "The old master." Nuts!

Donald Jalbert,
66 Juniper Street,
Winchendon, Mass.

To answer your questions not published, yes, Williams wrote both stories for the same cover. And back copies of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES *are 20c each up to and including March, 1942. However, issues further back may not be available for very long.—Ed.*

AN EASY GOING READER

Sirs:

I have been a particularly easy going reader of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for three years. In that time I haven't bothered with writing any comments to an editor, figuring that the fact I continued reading and buying all issues is proof of my feelings.

The reason for my departing from my usual procedure is the story "Spook For Yourself." It was one of the most appealing stories I've ever read. Simple and to the point. It was not an excellent story, but it was outstanding in my mind. So outstanding that I've broken three years' silence to tell you about it.

Why don't you publish a quarterly, like *Amazing Stories* does? Do they sell FANTASTIC in for-

CAUGHT in the gravity of the sun! The space ship and its occupants seemed doomed! Officious Major Gilchrist groveled on the floor, terrified by the irresistible gravity. . . . Sparks, normally brave, found his spinal column turning to a slow trickle of ice water. He had seen a ship gripped by Sol, a dark mote struggling against a brazen magnet . . . then a tiny, ochre flame glinting wanly . . .

Shrewd Lancelot Biggs, friend of all the crew, was aboard with his brand new wife. . . . "You must help me, Mr. Biggs! Save me—" Gilchrist wailed.

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eign lands? Wishing you continued success, and myself continued chances to read your magazine.

Pvt. 1st cl. Floyd Allchin,
Fort Dix, New Jersey.

We do publish a quarterly. The next issue will be on sale April 2. Due to the war, no copies are sold in foreign countries.—Ed.

MARCH ISSUE SUPERB

Sirs:

I just finished the March issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—superb! "Doorway to Hell" was super. Also, ERB's novel was even better than usual. All in all I could not find a single fault with the March issue, which is unusual for me, and I think that it is one of the best issues of FA ever published. The interior illustrations were especially noteworthy. Please keep up this excellent work, although I seriously doubt that such an issue as the March one will appear for quite awhile.

Jon F. McLeod,
1145 West Union Street,
Gainesville, Fla.

Thank you for them kind words, pal!—Ed.

MORE PATTON WANTED

Sirs:

Mac Girl o.k. Keep her on covers like "Doorway to Hell." Incidently that story was swell. Have Patton appear more often with long stories. Junk Oscar. He doesn't belong here. How about a Cummings story?

Alphonse Rakiec,
842 Second Street,
Grand Rapids, Mich.

We've asked Mr. Patton to think of us when he does his next story. We hope it will be soon. We'll keep you posted if anything is coming up by him.—Ed.

AN ASSURED CONSTANT READER

Sirs:

As long as you issue stories like "Tenant on the 13th Floor," "Later Than You Think," "The Fantastic Twins," "Afraid to Live," you will have a constant reader in me. I love those mysterious stories too. "Doorway to Hell" was the finest serial I have read so far.

Walter Kenyar,
1920 Cordova Ave.,
N. College Hill,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

We'll certainly continue to present stories of the type you list. And that's a promise. Which brings us to the end of the Reader's Page for this month. We certainly settled two things; decidedly more Mac Girls are wanted, and Frank Patton's serial is the most talked-about story of the year. We want to thank all you readers who wrote in, and whose letters were not published. We appreciate your comments, and we consider them carefully for our future policy.—Ed.

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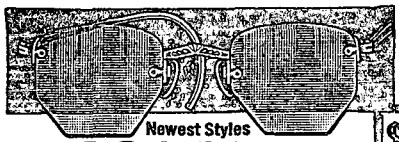

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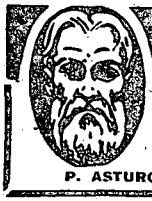

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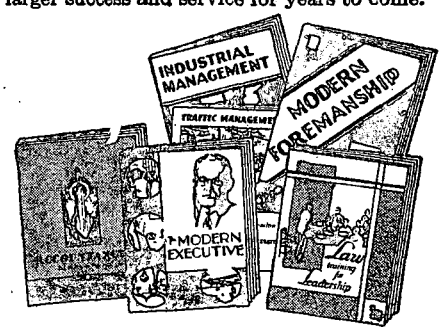

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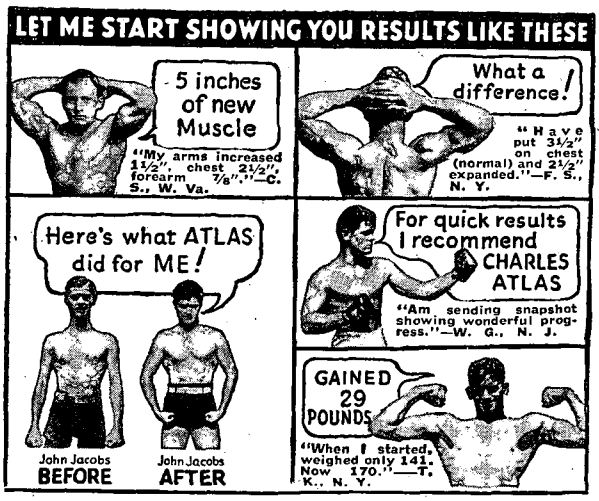

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